

THE FAMILY FARM IN THE POST-WORLD
WAR II ERA: INDUSTRIALIZATION, THE
COLD WAR AND POLITICAL SYMBOL

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by
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THE COLD WAR AND POLITICAL SYMBOL

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.....to Stephanie.

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THE FAMILY FARM IN THE POST-WORLD WAR II ERA:
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the particular path of technological change after World War II, how farm people adjusted to that change in their work and identity, as well as the policy implications of the numerous ramifications of the 20th century farm technology revolution. The rapid farm population decline that began with World War II continued to the end of the 20th century. This farm population loss combined with growing commodity surpluses, a Cold War atmosphere, and the transformation of farms into modern businesses to create tensions within federal farm policy that had for decades pursued the unified goals of improved farm living, increased production and technological adoption.

“The farm problem,” as it became known, highlighted the popular concern that farming was changing too quickly and would result in the extinction of the family farm, an ideal based on the agrarian myth but shaped by modern concerns of the growth of corporate farming and the international presence of collective farming in the Soviet Union. Under such conditions, tensions arose within farm policy between the older values and new concerns for the continuation of the family farm. These tensions often resulted in jumbled and contradictory federal farm policy that failed to stem the loss of smaller farms or the implementation of more technology.

The Family Farm in the Post-World War II Era: Industrialization, the Cold War and Political Symbol

Located along Interstate-72, in the gently rolling farmland of western Illinois, stands a weathered sign announcing to passersby the commodity prices farmers received at the time compared to prices sought by farmers. Voicing complaint with not only farm prices, but the many farm policies that determined the condition and situation of millions of farm families, the sign, now in obvious disrepair and surrounded by tall grass and brush, stands as a symbol of what became of so many of farmers struggling with low income due to narrowing profit margins. This sign indicates a problem experienced by so many farmers in the post-world War II period, namely low income compared to costs. It does not, however, explain how this problem developed or tell of the many factors that provide the context, notably the rapid technological changes in agriculture in the period after the Second World War. Yet, by calling for higher prices the sign directly protested U.S. farm policy in the post-World War II era, which for a variety of complicated and often contradictory reasons could and would do little to alleviate farmers' problems. In many ways, the sign stands as a crude historical monument to the condition of post-war American agriculture, the farm policies implemented and the values that provided the basis for farm policy. Moreover, the sign indicates the language of farm protest that developed in light of the countless changes in American agriculture during the time of its fastest and largest revolution that had shaken agriculture and all of its participants to the

core. The post-World War II period proved to be a transformative time for American farmers when technological changes in farm production tools led to monumental developments in agricultural policy, political rhetoric, and farmer mentality. Within each of these developments, the family farm became a concept that invoked powerful meaning that, in the end, has had lasting historical significance.

Before the U.S. became involved in World War II, farm population totaled over 30.5 million and represented 23 percent of the total population, a minority, but still considerable portion of the population.¹ Farming was still the largest occupation. An overwhelming majority of farmers throughout the Midwest and South lived in conditions reminiscent of the 19th century. Less than 36 percent of rural residents enjoyed the convenience of electricity in their homes; the same could be said of running water.² Most rural children received at best an 8th grade education in one-room schools despite the early efforts of reformers in the Country Life Movement, a movement which failed in its attempt to bring rural America into the 20th century and up to speed with urban America. A majority of farmers had basic, and often suspect, mud roads as their only physical connection to urban areas. For the most part, the radio (if the farm had electricity or battery power) offered the only connection to the outside world. Overwhelmingly, farming in most regions of the nation still consisted of many small-scale enterprises, limited by the labor and capital of farmers. Animals provided the main source of power, even, ironically, into the threshold of the atomic age and despite the invention of the gasoline powered tractor in the 1920s.

¹ R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 120.

² Lowry Nelson, *American Farm Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 36.

World War II, however, marked the beginning of several revolutions that ultimately reshaped rural America, especially farming. Between 1945 and the 1960s, farming experienced a technological revolution that irreversibly and completely altered food production. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, tractors quickly replaced mules and horses; so quickly, in fact, that the USDA census of agriculture stopped counting draft animals in 1959 there were so few to count. Scientific advancements in seeds, animal genetics, fertilizers and agricultural chemicals that were developed in the 1930s or during World War II became widely accepted and implemented by farmers who finally had the necessary capital, but also because they had particular forces in the post-war period pushing them to do so.

Farm people, moreover, had experienced the revolution of electricity after World War II. By 1960, 98% of all rural residents had electricity, which radically reshaped the standard of living.³ Through the miracle of electricity, farm families significantly reduced laborious and dangerous work, improved income through increased production, and experienced first hand, through radio in the 1930s and early 1940s and then television in the late 1950s and 1960s, mass culture. Finally, road development after World War II transformed the transportation system for rural America from one of periodic and intermittent availability to that of convenience, dependability and opportunity. From the 1930s through the early 1960s, local, state and national governments implemented road improvement programs that turned undependable and dangerous mud and dirt roads into widened, well-groomed gravel, if not paved, roads, providing farmers with daily and dependable access to markets, mass culture, and other modern conveniences. With easy

³ David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 290.

transportation, improved living standards, and the advent of technology that for the first time offered measurable amounts of leisure time for the farm population, rural Americans became integrated into a mass culture that had infiltrated urban America as far back as the 1910s.

Farm people migrated in record numbers as a result of the rapid improvement in farm productivity brought on by the introduction and mass adoption of mechanical power such as tractors, scientific advances such as animal and plant seed genetics, and the improved productive efficiency resulting from the use of newly available electricity. As the labor efficiency of farm workers improved through this period at a rate much higher than any other period in urban or rural history, the demand for farm workers fell dramatically. Faced with declining rural opportunities and freshly introduced to urban America with its growing demand for labor, higher wages, and higher standard of living, rural Americans rushed off farms at a pace never seen before in American history. The result was the fastest drop in rural population ever experienced in U.S. history in both rural population as a percentage of the national population and as a raw number. Indicative of the sheer volume of rural migration to urban areas during the 1950s, one-quarter of urban population growth experienced during that decade came as a direct result of rural migration.⁴

Looking at the big picture, by 1960, farmers represented just 8.7% of the total population, dramatically altering not only rural society, but urban society as well.⁵

Considering the specific situation of rural America and those who still remained in the

⁴ Olaf Larson and Everett M. Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition: The American Setting." in *Our Changing Rural Society: Perspectives and Trends*, ed. James H. Copp (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1964), 52.

⁵ Hurt. *Problems of Plenty*, 122.

1960s, life and farming were entirely different than they had been just a generation earlier. In a span of under twenty years, farming went from a common occupation, filled with labor intensive work, low pay, poor living conditions and isolation, to an occupation that involved less than one out of 12 people, required massive capital investment, but which enjoyed considerably higher income and all of the modern conveniences once exclusive to urban America.

While rural America began this period in isolation, one must not examine American agriculture in a vacuum. As the post-war agricultural revolution began, so too did the Cold War. The Cold War reshaped the entire American society in almost every perceptible way; from politics and economics to culture and values. Agriculture was no different. With the entire nation gripped by an anti-Communist ideology, such concerns inevitably cropped up in agricultural policy. Increasingly throughout this period, farm leaders touted an abundant food supply as a means of deterrence against a possible nuclear attack. The justification went like this: if the Soviets saw that the U.S. had plenty of food to weather an attack and come out strong, then making such an attack would become pointless. Further, food became a literal carrot in the Cold War battle to increase spheres of influence. Political leaders in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, as well as millions of farmers, believed that the U.S. could win the friendship and alliance of nations through food-based aid, especially as the Soviet Union struggled to feed even its own people. The structure and image of American agriculture became another set of tools in the rhetorical battle between communism and capitalism, one which American political leaders made sure to use. As the Soviet Union turned to collectives in its food

production, the U.S. strove increasingly to indicate the advantages not only of a capitalist food system, but a particular form, that of the family farm.

This concept, the family farm, while present before the advent of the Cold War, actually held little significance until productive systems would arise to present an option to a family-based system. Until the post-World War II period, one could talk about American agriculture in a singular term, “farming.” The “family” was simply assumed.⁶ In order for the rhetoric of “family farm” to take shape, it required an opposite entity against which “family farm” could be compared and defined. Another system of production became a more realistic option for American farmers as a result of the technological revolution in agriculture in the post-World War II period. With tractors and electricity, farms could now grow in size beyond the needs, capital and labor supply of individual families. Moreover, such technology allowed for farm tasks to become compartmentalized. Thanks to such technology, farmers could, and did, take on business tools and organizational structures which led to rapid growth in farm size and structure; growth to a massive scale that few at the time would have thought possible. Government policies aimed at stabilizing farm income only provided an incubator for farm size expansion. As a result, corporate farming became, for the first time in American history,

⁶ A crude, albeit effective indicator of the novelty of the term “family farm” in American language and thinking after World War II is a keyword search of “family farm” at the library system of the University of Missouri, a land grant and research-one institution, results in a number of returns with the earliest published in 1947. The concept would have a much longer recorded history had it been the vital concept it eventually became in the post-war period. A similar search through the Parks Library system at Iowa State University yielded one work published before the 1940s that specifically referred to the “family farm.” Similar results occurred in a search on Wilson Web, a broader search engine. Most works referred to “farm family,” a related, but different concept. In fact, references to “farm family” often imply that all farms had a family, that farming necessitated a family. For example, *Farm Economy; a Cyclopedia of Agriculture for the Practical Farmer and His Family* (Minneapolis: H.L. Baldwin, 1915) implies that a farmer does not farm without a family. Yet, many historians talk about the family farm throughout history, even though people in late 19th or early 20th century did not call it that. Projecting this concept onto other historical eras includes projecting particular values and cultural concepts.

a viable option for most every type of farm, not just large wheat farms of the Great Plains where such corporate farming developed and then died out in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷

By the early 1950s, new concerns cropped up over a perceived threat to the survival of the typical smaller family-size farm brought on by corporate farms and the foreign threat of the Soviet collective farms. This concern quickly gained traction as a major issue that shaped farm policy for the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first while also highlighting the many contradictions within U.S. farm policy. The rapid rise in concern about “the corporate threat” to the family farm denotes the widely-held perception that unlike any other time, family farms faced their toughest challenges in the post-World War II era.

Under these circumstances, American farm policy makers followed two ideals with the Cold War in mind: increase production to meet world needs and publicize the advantages of the family farm. Yet, farm policy aimed at boosting production and aiding the growth of family farms came up against popular concerns about corporate farming. Simply put, among the many other factors going into farm policy, political leaders had to somehow pursue the goal of maintaining a prosperous and competitive farm economy without promoting such a prosperous or competitive farm economy as to create an unacceptable level of concentration.

As farming experienced a revolution, so too, did farmers’ identities and values. In the midst of the Cold War atmosphere and a changing national consumer and business

⁷ In truth, larger-than-family-farms existed for quite some time in American history. Slave-based cotton plantations of the South existed since the founding of the nation. Also, large fruit and vegetable farms located in California had corporatized a few commodities as far back as the 19th century. Nonetheless, smaller family farms remained the overwhelming majority. Moreover, technological and environmental realities ensured that neither cotton slave plantations nor California ranches could spread to other regions or commodities. The technological revolution of the post-war era made corporate expansion a real threat.

culture, farmer identity by no means could remain unchanged. Moreover, confronted with a new reality in farming, one of rising capital needs and shrinking profit margins, farmers borrowed ideas from the business world as a means of becoming more cost efficient. For those adept at change and keen on the business aspects of post-war farming, this period became an opportunity to raise their income which, for the first time in American history, allowed some farm people to experience the higher living standards experienced by most urban residents.

For many farmers, however, this was a difficult transition; they often did not stay on the farm to see the 1960s. The rapid rural to urban migration, pushed by falling farm income, smaller profit margins and increased urban employment opportunities caused a total restructuring of the cultural and political landscape. Once considered the most important voting group in America and having major political power in Congress since the American Revolution, the farm bloc had almost certainly disappeared by the end of the 1950s as farm people quickly fell to less than 8% of the national population. The Supreme Court case of *Baker v. Carr*, decided in 1962, proved a seminal event in this shift by requiring enforcement of reapportionment after years of neglect by rural-elected state legislatures. The new voting patterns left the remaining farmers concerned over how to maintain even a small portion of their old political power. The vastly diminished farm population and the revolution in agriculture not only reduced the number of farmers, but had changed farming so profoundly that many urban residents once willing to concede a disproportionate amount of political power to farmers had begun to seriously challenge this political inequality. Moreover, many Americans began to question the applicability

of the agrarian myth that justified disproportionate farm political power as farms increasingly diverged from the historically-based ideal.

In light of the technological revolution in farming, the Cold War atmosphere, the growing competitiveness of farming, the largest rural migration in American history, and broad, popular concerns regarding the farm situation, farm policy leaders were confronted with many problems. Guiding policy development through this time were particular values, often competing or contradictory. Understanding these values helps explain the path of farm policy throughout this era and the way in which contemporary farm policy arrived at its own jumbled mess. Political leaders from both parties developed or continued many policies with the purpose of improving farm labor efficiency, improving acreage efficiency, improving farm efficiency through specialization and increasing total agricultural output. However, these same leaders also created policies designed to suppress farm output and limit farm profits.

In another set of policy contradictions that developed during this period, political leaders under the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations sought to help farms grow towards a more efficient size, while at the same time pursuing policies aimed at preventing farms from becoming too efficient. Efficient farms, after all, led to the farm surplus problem. Discrepancies arose among policies, highlighting the contradictions in values Americans held toward farming. The price support system, while intended to help low income farmers survive flooded markets and the associated low commodity prices, also often led to disproportionate aid for larger farms with larger productive capacity. In this sense, as with other farm policies, basic underlying values shaped the ways in which politicians and the public alike defined agricultural problems as well as acceptable ways

in which government could solve the defined problems. Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s government officials attempted various solutions, ranging from the Brannan Plan to the Soil Bank to the foreign aid program called Food for Peace as a means of stabilizing agriculture, reducing the impact of low farm prices, and limiting the massive off-farm migration that had so many people concerned about the social and cultural impact of such a monumental population shift. None of the policies implemented, however, proved entirely successful or cost-effective at resolving what became known as “the farm problem.” This ineffectiveness resulted from underlying values that limited the definition of acceptable policy options and thus limited the means through which government could address the farm problem. Underlying cultural values even led to outright contradiction among policies, resulting in rising government costs with little success to show for it.

The post-war changes in agriculture created new tensions within underlying American values toward farming and farm policy.⁸ While Americans showed concern for farmers confronted with a cost-price squeeze, Americans also did not like the idea of farmers becoming too-successful in getting through the squeeze, at least not through corporations or cooperative structures. Identical to their concerns over excessive growth of corporate farms, people worried that the growth of farm cooperatives, which had seen dramatic growth as the agricultural revolution occurred, posed threats to the free enterprise system. Privately owned businesses in competition with farm coops in areas such as animal feed, crop seeds, commodity marketing, and hardware stores all felt

⁸ Until the post-World War II era farm policy goals lacked many of the contradictions of post-war farm policy. Policies aimed at growing farm size and efficiency worked well with the idea of helping small farmers. Moreover, without large, corporate farms, the policy tool of price supports worked relatively well in dispersing aid.

threatened by the growth of farmer cooperatives, a concern heightened by the atmosphere of the Cold War with a pervasive fear of any left-leaning policy or group. Consumers also did not like to see anyone in the food industry profit too much. Such “excess” profit meant consumers paid too much for food. In the midst of tough economic times, farmers learned to act collectively, especially to buy and sell goods, even if such cooperative tools held negative connotations.

Frustrated with the loss of business to farmer-owned cooperatives, business owners organized to act politically in order to rewrite the Federal tax code to eliminate any economic advantage farmers experienced through coops and lobbied to create federal policies that punished farmers for joining coops. Confronted by massive changes, farmers forged new identities intended to make sense of their new place and relationships with others, to maintain some cultural power based on the old agrarian myth, and to provide an ideal around which they could rally political support. Farm cooperatives learned to combat the political challenge of business competitors by playing on the concern for the family farm, creating further cause for the rhetoric of the family farm to spring forth from the post-World War II era. This new farm identity played a key role in the cooperative resurgence in the early post-war period.

Key to each of these issues of agriculture in the post-World War II period was the image, political rhetoric, mentality and cultural symbol of the family farm. The ideal of the family farm became a rallying cry in light of the rapid off-farm migration, the increasing competition and diminishing profit margins of farming, and a perceived increasing threat from corporate farming. This ideal also became the identity of the farmers who remained, shaping their views of the world, their own situation, and the

relationship between the two. This concept became the lens through which Americans viewed farming in the post-World War II period and through which farm policies were created. Truly, the family farm was a dynamic concept, one that developed and changed in light of new circumstances. Many agricultural historians, and the general public for that matter, assume it to be a static, perpetual institution. The family farm, in fact, is a dynamic and fluid institution.⁹

Yet, in light of the rapid transformation occurring in agriculture in which farmers went from isolated laborers living in substandard conditions to modern business leaders enjoying all of the modern conveniences available to urban Americans, this image of the family farm became increasingly muddled and indefinable. Throughout the post-war era the simple and enduring image of farming lost its hold over the American psyche. By the early 1960s, the reality of farming challenged popular the image, causing many people to hold onto the image all the more as the revolution down on the farm continued. For many Americans, farming no longer came close to the cultural ideal, leaving many people jaded with farm policies that gave money to some farmers who clearly did not need it.

In essence, Americans had a difficult time adjusting their ideals to the post-World War II period of rapid agricultural transformation. At this time new values arose that challenged long-held values that had for years guided farm policy. Yet, new ideals, in some instances, actually further propped up agricultural policies based on old values. The concept of the family farm, riddled with uncertainty, holding a seemingly unique meaning for every American, could at once be an argument to raise price supports for

⁹ Eric Foner, the *Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) provides an excellent example of a work that shows the dynamic nature of freedom, another concept most people assume to be static.

farmers, and too get rid of them entirely. The political rhetoric surrounding this concept of “family farm” reshaped the agriculture policy process throughout the era and has become an enduring force still present in today’s electoral process. Taken in combination with the federal government’s pro-growth, pro-technology adoption policies, the rhetoric of the family farm has resulted in jumbled and often contradictory policies from the beginning of the post-war period and continuing into the beginning of the 21st century. Moreover, the changing image of farming and the development of this powerful rhetoric through this period has resulted in a disconnect between the reality of farming today and the image held by many Americans. By examining the relationship between values and policies, this study will help explain the development of seemingly contradictory and counterproductive policies that continue to exist yet today.

“The Family Farm in the Post-World War II Era: Industrialization, the Cold War and Political Symbol” provides a political and social history of post-war changes and their consequences. Moreover, it will provide a policy study into the ways in which cultural ideals play a part in directing the path of agricultural policy. Little historical work has been conducted on agriculture in the post-World War II period. Studies considering similar issues have, for the most part, focused on the early twentieth century with the initial development of early technologies and the first stages of adoption.¹⁰

¹⁰ Such works include: Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Hal Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill, 1999); and Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). These works tend to focus on the origins of industrialization and its initial impacts rather than on the period in which industrialization came to dominate or they examine solely the impact of technology on farm life without examining larger political implications or conversely, the impact of American politics and culture on farm life.

One of the best of these works, Deborah Fitzgerald's *Every Farm a Factory: the Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* examines the development of corporations in agriculture in the interwar years. While providing sound analysis of the early uses of newly available mechanical power as a means for applying corporate Taylorism to farming, such a study is quite limited in its application to most of the farming population. The technology available before World War II made farm incorporation a possibility only for agriculture in the Great Plains wheat growing region, fruit and vegetable growers of the West and cotton farmers of the Southwest. For most Midwestern, Southern, and Eastern farmers, such tools, both mechanical and business, were inapplicable to their situations. Unlike with Great Plains wheat farming, most farming practices remained true to old, time-worn methods which limited the size of most farms. Dairy farms, still lacking electricity for the most part, could raise typically fewer than 10 cows. Cattle and hog farms of the Midwest were similarly limited by the productive capacity of labor. Cotton farming, without the advent of the mechanical cotton picker in the 1940s, was still based on manual labor and a system of production identical to that of the late 19th century.

So while Fitzgerald's study may provide an accurate description of early attempts at corporatization in American agriculture, the fact remains that such attempts rarely occurred and that the overwhelming majority of farmers did not confront issues of corporatization until after World War II when new technological developments made this a possibility. Because corporate farming posed a rather insignificant possibility before World War II, the issue of saving the family farm also did not, and could not arise until a force as powerful as corporate farming developed to threaten the very existence of

family-based farming.¹¹ Simply put, family farming could not be defined as such until it had an opposite against which it could be compared.

R. Douglas Hurt's *Problems of Plenty: the American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* does an admirable job of covering some of the changes in agriculture in the twentieth Century, including the post-World War II era.¹² The framework or lens through which Hurt examines American agriculture in this period, however, leads to an artificially narrow analysis of this broad topic. By assuming over-supply to be the biggest, and perhaps only, problem farmers faced, *Problems of Plenty* automatically precludes any analysis of the multiple problems farmers confronted and assumes that failure to resolve problems of over-production resulted simply from failed policies and not potentially, from policies that actually sought to boost production for other, perhaps more dominant, social and political values.¹³ We need to ask, would Americans prefer not to have the surplus problem? The answer to this rhetorical question, after some careful consideration, would be a thorough "no." In this situation, the way things are, while not necessarily the way they had to or ought to have been, were that way for a

¹¹ Similarly, *Mary Neth's Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* examines early 20th century developments and farm people's responses.

¹² R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

¹³ Bruce L. Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How It Flourished and What It Cost* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), similar to Hurt, looks at the obvious or stated problems of modern agriculture. Gardner, like Hurt, fails to place problems within context. Dennis Nordin and Roy Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: the Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), also fails to consider the context of agricultural problems. Representative of that failure, Nordin and Scott hold an underlying attitude that farm failure could only occur because of inadequacy in individual farmers, and not due to systematic or structural problems. "For many more farmers, those with less optimism and opportunities due to either their inept management, unwise investments, or general pessimism about the future of agriculture, careers on farms would end involuntarily between 1945 and 1970." (149). J.L. Anderson, "Industrializing the Corn Belt: Iowa Farmers, Technology, and the Midwestern Landscape, 1945-1972" (Ph.D. Diss., Iowa State University, 2006) provides an excellent analysis into the farmers' perspective on the adoption of technology.

reason. The structure of American agriculture and agricultural policy formation fulfills the most dominant values of society, namely of production, efficiency, equality of opportunity and equal treatment under the law. Only when those values are fulfilled or maintained have policy leaders tried adjust farm policy to address other values or concerns, namely saving the family farm.

As a policy study, my work will provide key insights into the policy process that can inform and educate readers of the modern agricultural policy process.¹⁴ Typically, policy studies on American agriculture examine the “politics” of policy, or the ways in which groups organize themselves and interact in the rent seeking process better known as lobbying. This is where major agriculture policy works such as John Mark Hanson, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919-1981*, Don Paarlberg, *American Farm Policy*, Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years*, and Hugh Ulrich, *Losing Ground: Agricultural Policy and the Decline of the American Farm* all fit into the historiography. While excellent studies of the intricacies of agricultural politics, they fail to draw out the larger meaning and significance behind or resulting from the process of agricultural policy development. In essence, they accept without

¹⁴ Works that examine the agricultural policy process include: James T. Bonnen, “Observations on the Changing Nature of National Agricultural Policy Decision Processes, 1946-76” in *Farmers, Bureaucrats, and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture*, ed. Trudy H. Peterson (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980); John Brewster, *Goals and Values in Agriculture Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961); William P. Browne, et al. *Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Milton Hallberg, *Policy for American Agriculture: Choices and Consequences* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1992); John Mark Hanson, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919-1981* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Don Paarlberg, *American Farm Policy* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964); Luther Tweeten, *Foundations of Farm Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); and Hugh Ulrich, *Losing Ground: Agricultural Policy and the Decline of the American Farm* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1989). However, these works generally provide studies into the roles and actions of policy actors and not the underlying values of the society at the time. Moreover, these works often pull the agricultural policy process out of context by failing to consider the influence of outside factors such as broad popular concerns, cultural values, foreign policy issues and economic interests of non-farmers.

question the context in which policies develop rather than analyze the impact the larger culture or political atmosphere has on policy development.¹⁵

“The Family Farm in the Post World War II Era: Industrialization, the Cold War and Political Symbol,” addresses many issues from many different angles; one must do so in order to provide complete analysis of the development of policy, a process that involves factors ranging from technology and foreign affairs to cultural values and politics to the influence of the real situation faced by farmers and consumers as well as their perception of reality. And in a period with such dramatic change in so many of those factors, the policy process becomes all the more complicated. In order to break down the forces at work I will take two approaches, chronological and thematic. I will begin the story with a chronological approach, examining initial changes in farming and farm life; by doing so I will inherently grant more influence to such factors over others. The policy developments in the post-war period for the most part arose in response to technological changes that began at the start of the 20th century and dramatically quickened after World War II. From there, I will generally continue the chronological approach, but will then diverge into specific themes, pulling various factors to the center of the story in order to fully explain how each affected the others. “The Family Farm in the Post World War II Era” will then reintegrate the themes back into a total story with a chronological finish in 1962 concluding with some of the major revolutions that by the 1960s had reshaped American agriculture and farm policy.

¹⁵ A few works in the policy and historical field have considered the impact of societal values on the policy process. This topic, however, remains woefully understudied, especially in relation to specific policy areas. See Daniel Yankelovich, “How Changes in the Economy are Reshaping American Values,” in *Values and Public Policy*, ed. Henry J. Aaron, Thomas E. Mann and Timothy Taylor (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994) and Michael Foley, *American Credo: the Place of Ideas in U.S. Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Chapter 1 will examine the technological developments that provided a major force behind the many rapid changes occurring in agriculture after World War II. Many agricultural historians portray the adoption of technology as a result of outside forces pushing farmers to adopt machines only out of necessity of survival and against their will.¹⁶ One cannot ignore, however, the hope that farmers had for a new tractor, better seed, or more productive animals to bring them a better standard of living while reducing the back-breaking toil that defined their lives. The technological revolution that ensued not only reshaped agricultural production, but acted as perhaps the biggest influence that forced dramatic changes in society, values, politics and policies.

The ways farmers dealt with the agricultural revolution and its economic consequences will thematically follow in chapter 2. As the post-war era unfolded, farmers soon realized they were in the midst of a new era in agriculture, having to race one another in farm size and technological implementation in order to survive rising surpluses and falling commodity prices. Farmers developed multiple means of confronting the new pressures of farming. Some turned to off-farm work as a source of supplemental income. Many left farming altogether. These changes held significant

¹⁶ This idea of adoption-against-one's-will pervaded works in agricultural history and rural sociology for over 30 years. Only recently have academics in both fields begun to recognize the "pull" factors, not just the "push" factors to agricultural technology adoption. Examples of the adoption-against-one's-will approach include Mark Friedberger, *Farm Families and Change in Twentieth-Century America* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988); Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Dennis S. Nordin and Roy V. Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: the Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Gilbert Fite, *American Farmers: The New Minority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Richard G. Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age: The Loup Country of Nebraska, 1910-1970* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976). Examples of works that recognize the pull factors in technology adoption include Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

policy implications. Moreover, farmers and the broader American society developed new cultural concepts as a means of coping with this rapid change. Meanwhile, the Cold War propelled all Americans to seek refuge in American institutions. The 1950s generally can be seen as a decade of focus on the family.¹⁷ Similarly, the development of corporate farming in the 1950s pushed many to fear the potential end of all smaller, albeit less efficient, family farms. For many Americans, the Jeffersonian myth, the idea that farm people held superior traits and, therefore, improved the culture and politics of the entire nation, still applied to modern society and provided a means of differentiating themselves from their Soviet opponents.

A particularly contentious and heated battle over the taxation of farm cooperatives provides key insight into a dramatic shift in popularly held values and is the focus of chapter 3. Chapter 4 examines Truman farm policies and in particular, the development of family farm rhetoric within a Cold War context.¹⁸ Chapter 5 examines the Eisenhower Administration, while also implementing family farm rhetoric for Cold War needs, attempting to redefine the term in light of rapid technological changes and the rapid off-farm migration. The key themes in each chapter include the development and use of political rhetoric that involved the concept of the family farm, the development of new values in agricultural policy, and the concomitant competition between the new values

¹⁷ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988) provides an excellent study of Americans' desire for family in light of Cold War tensions. Other works include Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), Lisle Abbott Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999) and Cynthia Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003).

¹⁸ In the early stages of the Cold War, Under Secretary of Agriculture, Clarence J. McCormick explained to government officials the importance of focusing support on family farms. "The American family farm pattern is one of the Nation's main exhibits in the world struggle for men's minds and one of the examples we hold out for the entire world to see." Clarence J. McCormick to Members of the Policy and Program Committee, 1 February 1951, Charles Brannan Papers, Box 24, File: Family Farm [1 of 2], Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

and old, all of which radically reshaped agricultural policy debates and the resulting policies.

Finally, chapter 6 will examine key events in one year, 1962, to provide a conclusion to this important stage in farming and farm policy, but also to provide an indication of trends that continue beyond the scope of this study. In 1962, the Supreme Court ruled on a landmark case. *Baker v. Carr* required reapportionment of state congressional districts to undo years of neglect by rural-elected state officials that resulted in long-standing over-representation for rural residents and under-representation for urban voters. This case brought to light the conflict over saving the family farm and the ideal of political equality. To add to family farmers' concerns, in the summer of 1962, the Committee for Economic Development, a group of influential business leaders that made policy suggestions, presented its solution to the highly debated farm problem. One part of the Committee's solution involved removing excess farm families from agricultural production. This concept received a hail of opposition from those concerned with the survival of the family farm. Lastly, in the fall of 1962, the National Farmers Organization (NFO), an upstart farm organization that sought increased market power as the solution to the survivability of the family farm, held its first major withholding action, in essence a strike, in an attempt to raise the price farmers received on beef, pork and wheat. This attempt to save the family farm through manipulation of market influence eventually failed due to not only the lack of support of non-participating farmers but also of consumers. The failure of the NFO led member farmers to believe all the more in the eventual extinction of the family farm and to take more extreme actions in years following.

The brief epilogue will pick up these trends in present-day America, examining the impact of a revolution in agriculture, the further development of the rhetorical tool and cultural concept known as “the family farm,” and the subsequent impact on farm policies. As a result of the pervasive rhetoric of the family farm, contemporary nonfarm attitudes toward farming mirror a historical concept and bucolic image rather than the often-industrialized modern reality. Instead of recognizing the industrialization that has occurred in agriculture over the last 50 years, urban and suburban dwellers cling to a historical notion of a small, quaint and simple family farm-based agriculture whose celebration was so pervasive in America in the post-World War II era and that it led to inappropriate and misguided farm policy. Today, Americans celebrate a past image of family farms because many find it too difficult to recognize the fact that family farms can still have family qualities while yet taking on full industrialization. The incompatibility between the two ideas had been reinforced for over a generation as a result of family farm rhetoric. Ending such a strict and inappropriate definition of the family farm will take years.

The Farm Technology Revolution

For millions of farmers such as Richard Collins and his father (both of Clark, Missouri) advances in technology in the post World War II period offered hope and new opportunity for a better life. At the same time, these advances also created an uncomfortable level of uncertainty brought on by increased debt and dependence on the unknown. Decimated by the Great Depression and forced to make due during World War II, farmers admittedly felt leery of costly technological adoption, even if it promised to make their lives easier. Richard Collins recalled asking his father if he would want to try some fertilizer on a cornfield in the 1940s. Illustrating the initial resistance to new technology, “Oh, I don’t think so,” came the reply. Despite his father’s hesitations, Richard took a bag of ammonium nitrate to his father’s farm over the Fourth of July holiday in 1949. They applied the fertilizer to the poorest producing part of the field, a ditch in the back of a field “that never grows anything higher than three foot.” The fertilizer application worked as Collins had hoped, “That fall, the best corn in the cornfield was in the ditch.”¹ At that point his father became a believer in the benefits of new agricultural technology. Meanwhile, millions of other farmers saw on their own what Richard Collins demonstrated to his father.

The rapid adoption of newly available technology in the post-World War II period occurred in almost every facet of farm life, quickly and irreversibly altering farming and

¹ Richard Collins, interview by author, 31 March 2005, Clark, Missouri, tape recording, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri (hereafter WHMC).

farm living. Moreover, this technology held huge ramifications for culture, domestic and international politics and agricultural policy and, in many ways, forms the basis for understanding all other social changes that occurred in American agriculture after World War II. It is after all, only with the advent and adoption of new seeds, fertilizer, electricity, tractors and other tools that farm production and labor efficiency soared to unimaginable heights in a matter of only a few years. This increased production and improved productivity proved the immediate cause of record surpluses which quickly and continuously depressed farm commodity prices, forcing political leaders to find new policies to address the issue of rising farm costs in the midst of falling commodity prices; what became known as the cost-price squeeze.² This new technology also led directly to a declining need for farmers. Coupled with the cost-price squeeze and the increasingly competitive nature of farming, millions of farmers left farming for urban occupations that offered a better, more stable income than that provided in agriculture. Similarly, the rapid adoption of new technologies altered farmers' identities as well as the ways in which farmers interacted. Finally, coupled with prevailing cultural attitudes which valued farming as a preferred occupation, the farm surplus led to new conditions in which old policies no longer applied. This forced political leaders to develop new policies in light of a revolutionized agriculture.

Before we can understand the various long-term impacts, meaning, and importance of this agricultural transformation we must examine the many reasons farmers had for adopting tractors, fertilizers, electricity and other key developments.

Understanding the reasons farmers had for implementing new technology helps shed light

² While surpluses were not new in the late 1940s, their size and the nature of their growth was quite different from the surpluses of earlier periods driven more by falling domestic or international demand than rising production.

on the process of adoption and the cultural, social, and policy impacts experienced as a result. A few key ideas play a heavy role here including the societal ideology of progress and technology. In farming this meant reducing labor-intensive work, finding economic stability, improving lifestyle to match that of urban America, developing more business-like operations, improving social status and finding a means of keeping farm kids interested in farming.

First, like most other members of American society, many farmers wholeheartedly believed in the idea and goal of progress through technology.³ It was only through the creation and adoption of new inventions such as antibiotics, the railroad system and electricity that improvement in the living standards of millions of Americans occurred. Having a recent history of technological advancements, Americans developed a sense of technological determinism guided by the realistic hope for better lives. They came to “expect it and demand it in all segments of the economy.”⁴ Cognizant of a long history of minimal change disrupted abruptly in the late 19th and 20th centuries with a rash of new inventions, Americans came to view technology as a sign of progress, a means of improving their standard of living. Buoyed by the hope that new farm inventions brought, farmers sought after newly developed items such as tractors, water

³ Richard Merrill, “Agribusiness and the Decaying Rural Environment,” in *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences, and Alternatives*, ed. Richard Rodefeld (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 254. Merrill noted “That the American public tends to ascribe most of the good things in life to machines...goes without saying.” (254). Other works that note the pervasive belief in technology in the 19th and 20th centuries include David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), Hugo Meier, “The Ideology of Technology,” *Technology and Social Change in America*, ed. Edwin T. Layton, Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) and Joel Colton and Stuart Bruchey, eds., *Technology, the Economy, and Society: The American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁴ Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 105

pumps and electricity, with its assorted appliances, under the impression that such products provided specific means to the end of progress.

Beyond a general idea of progress as a key motivation for the adoption of new agricultural inventions, other factors and ideas unique to farm life helped to subtly or even blatantly persuade farm families to seek more expensive farm tools. First and foremost among these factors was the hope of ending the backbreaking and laborious nature of farming. Granted, while some farmers avoided newly available technologies out of concern for the cultural implications, their monetary costs, or the negative consequences they would have on neighborhood relationships, such concerns have become over-valued by historians seeking to understand the farmer mentality. These historical interpretations instead project more recent values onto the past. While ably noting the ideological concerns with the adoption of new farming tools, these historians fail to truly put themselves in farmers' shoes to understand the primary concerns of farm folk struggling to eek out an existence.⁵

From the farmers' vantage point, one can easily discern the justification for purchasing a tractor with larger equipment, installing electric wire in the barn or using fertilizers and chemical treatments on crops; each made great strides in reducing back-breaking work that had defined farming for generations.⁶ A lifetime of 12 or 14-hour days that involved hard labor not only made life difficult for millions of farmers but actually reduced the lifespan of farm people. With few changes, farming in the 1930s

⁵ Works that tend to undervalue farmers' desires to reduce labor include Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: the Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶ One work in particular shows the value farm families placed on easing the difficult labor of farming. See Katherine Jellison's *Entitled to Power Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

looked a lot like farming in the 1880s or 1890s; days filled with labor intensive activities from cultivating fields and harvesting to the simplest of chores such as hauling water and firewood. Moreover, without electricity, farm people completed work by the dim glow of lanterns which only increased the danger associated with working on a farm. Rural living conditions at the threshold of the post-World War II era similarly mirrored those found on the farm in the 19th century.⁷ The overwhelming majority of farmers still lacked electricity and indoor plumbing, while a large number lacked even automobiles. Thus, just to live in rural America required endless work such as feeding horses or hauling water to the house or seemingly continuous food preparation and animal care for women.⁸

So as much as farm people may have worried about possibly losing the friendship of a neighbor by replacing communal threshing with an individually-owned combine harvester, for instance, most farmers would easily make the choice to adopt labor-saving technology because it greatly reduced the amount of physical labor needed to farm while improving the quality of life in rural homes. With electricity farm people enjoyed the home conveniences that had existed for many years in urban America. Also, work on the farm dramatically changed with the advent of electricity and tractors. Farm people could now work by the light of electric bulbs, making work more productive and less dangerous. Electricity also allowed farm people to harness the benefits of mechanical power that human or animal power could not achieve. Electricity allowed dairy farmers to implement pipelines and bulk milk tanks which not only made dairy work less labor

⁷ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 10.

⁸ The issue of the gendered division of labor on farms and the impact of technology will be discussed later in the chapter. For additional coverage of this issue see Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power*.

intensive, but improved the productivity of cows, kept milk safer, and increased the productive capacity of each farm. Electricity allowed cattle, hog and poultry producers to directly deliver feed and water to animals, again reducing labor needs and also improving productivity.

Farmers also sought to adopt new technologies for the simple reason that they provided more control and stability over their means of production. As the well-known farm manager Howard Doane noted, “The search for stability in agriculture has been a long and continuing one.”⁹ Tractors improved fieldwork efficiency over horses in two ways. They could work in less than optimal conditions and tractors covered much more ground. In doing so, tractors allowed farmers to plant, cultivate, and harvest fields at less-than optimal times, which increased production. Moreover, farmers could get fieldwork done in a much shorter amount of time, leaving themselves less susceptible to weather delays, which would allow them to maximize total production. New hybrid seeds also helped farmers increase control and overcome the difficulties associated with dependence on the vagaries of nature. These new seeds could better withstand extremes in drought, excess rain, heat or cold. Thus, farmers increased their ability to maintain production whereas before the advent of hybrid seeds they would suffer major losses of income which often led to farm foreclosure. Similarly, fertilizers, which developed and become widely implemented after World War II, allowed farmers to increase field production in any type of weather. Indicative of the hope of stabilizing the once

⁹ “Testimony of D. Howard Doane for the Chamber of Commerce of the United States before the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry,” March 26, 1954, found in File 94, D. Howard Doane Papers, WHMC.

uncontrollable nature, agricultural scientists commented: “Our purpose in agriculture is to stimulate, direct, or retard the changes that Nature wants to accomplish.”¹⁰

Farming before World War II involved intensive and never ending labor, but because farmers were limited in their productive capacity by the amount of human and animal labor they could provide, farming also provided inadequate income to afford farm families a standard of living commensurate with that of urban America. This provided one reason for farm husbands and wives to have more children per family than urban families; child labor provided one of the few means through which farmers could increase the productive capacity of their farms.¹¹ The advent of post-World War II technologies such as tractors and electricity however, freed farmers from the restrictions of human and animal labor, allowing farm productive capacity to grow beyond the limitations of muscle. Tractors not only allowed farmers to increase the number of acres they cultivated, but they also allowed farmers to dedicate more acres to market production by transforming acreage previously dedicated to food production for draft animals. Electricity allowed farmers, as noted earlier, to increase herd sizes beyond the limits of human labor and improve product quality.

With capacity greatly increased, farmers developed a means for a higher income, which in turn allowed farm families to improve their standard of living. They could now produce enough corn, milk, wheat, pork, or beef for the market to provide money that could pay for indoor plumbing, electricity in the home, more vehicles with which

¹⁰ W.V. Hukill, Robert A. Saul and Daniel W. Teare, “Outrunning Time: Combating Weather,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: USGPO, 1960), 183.

¹¹ In 1940, farm families had on average 4.01 members while urban families were smaller with an average of 3.61 members. See Paul C. Glick, “Family Trends in the United States,” *American Sociological Review* 7 (Aug. 1942), 512.

families could travel to town more often and, later on by the 1950s and early 1960s, television that connected farm families to mass culture. With the advent of the new labor saving technologies as well as full integration into mass culture, the need for children to provide labor fell. Correspondingly, the gap between family size of farm and urban families closed considerably after World War II.¹² Seeing the potential improvement in standard of living that new technologies provided, farmers found another reason to quickly adopt newly available farm technologies, they made life easier and put consumerism within their reach.¹³

In a related consideration, the advent of new labor-saving technology and production-increasing technology allowed farm families to reduce the amount of labor consumed by the farm. By the 1950s, farm families developed free time much like that already enjoyed by urban Americans.¹⁴ Farm families did not have to work from “sun up” to “sun down.” They could find time in the evenings to listen to the radio (or watch television by the late 1950s), take trips to urban areas for shopping and entertainment, and even start taking family vacations. In having such free time, farm families increasingly took part in mass culture, integrating themselves to the point that, by the 1960s, few could discern any noticeable difference in the lives, cultural awareness, or personalities between farm and urban people. Truly, by the 1960s, the long-time derisive terms of “hayseed” or “hick” that had enraged and frustrated farmers for years no longer

¹² Ronald R. Rindfus and James A. Sweet, “Rural Fertility Trends and Differentials,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 7 (Nov. 1975), 264.

¹³ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 6.

¹⁴ Lowry Nelson, *American Farm Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 43.

applied to farm people as they learned to participate in and blend into mass American culture.

If ending back-breaking labor, improving economic stability, gaining leisure time and improving their standard of living did not provide incentive enough for farmers to adopt the many technologies and inventions emerging in the post-World War II era, the desire to improve status could become a motivating factor in two ways. For generations farmers gained or lost status among neighbors according to the amount of crops produced. Increasing productivity and production quite literally became a means of measuring a man's productivity and hence, contribution to society. After all, for years those that thought about food production saw it (and arguably still see it today) as perhaps one of the most valued works anyone could pursue. Hence, to have success, as measured by productivity or output, could mean high status.

Ironically, despite the high status accorded to those who produced the nation's food, farmers throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries received increasing scorn from the urban business world for their failure to take on rational, scientific, and capital-intensive production methods. It was not that farmers necessarily regressed in techniques through this time, but that urban businesses simply developed and adopted such structures much earlier and faster than those in the agricultural sector. Nonetheless, farmers paid the price for failure to keep up. As manufacturers increasingly turned to Taylorism, the assembly line, and labor-saving technologies that increased production while reducing costs in both capital and human terms, farming continued down the path

of muscle-dependent production and production techniques rooted in age-old practices with little and often no scientific or rational structure.¹⁵

By the turn of the 20th century urban America had changed so much and rural America so little that President Teddy Roosevelt began to ask questions about why rural America was so backwards. In charging Liberty Hyde Bailey to lead the Country Life Commission, President Roosevelt voiced the popular concern urban Americans had for the condition of their rural cousins. Urban people were apprehensive of their rural counterparts. More importantly, they were anxious for themselves and concerned about what a backwards rural America meant for the millions of urban citizens dependent upon an ill-fed, ill-housed, uneducated people to provide food for the entire nation. The urban-based Progressive reform movement sought every measure available at the time to coax American farm families to take on better production methods and standards of living.¹⁶ Education became the centerpiece for more progressive urbanites, but for the many non-farmers who took a less apologetic tone, outright ridicule, chastisement, and ostracization continued as the preferred route. For urbanites more concerned about the negative impacts they personally experienced as consumers dependent on farmers for their food than about the problems experienced by farm people living in areas without modern conveniences, ridicule of “backwards” farmers made urbanites feel better about themselves, even if ineffective in urging farm people toward modernization.

This social ridicule, which derided farmers for using old, time-honored agricultural practices, continued through the farm depression experienced after World

¹⁵ Gove Hambidge, “Farmers in a Changing World—a Summary,” in *Farmers in a Changing World: 1940 Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington: USGPO, 1940), 7.

¹⁶ David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979), Vii.

War I, through the Great Depression, and continued into the Post-World War II period, not declining until farm people began to adopt new scientific and industrialized practices.¹⁷ The ridicule did not stop in good or bad years. When farmers experienced good market prices for their crops, urbanites cried for higher production through industrialization of agriculture to reduce their food prices. When farmers went through years of low market prices, urban reformers who actually worried about farm people hounded them to industrialize so that farm people could still become more efficient and thus, survive lower prices. In any situation, more technology seemed the answer and continuation of old practices centered on human and animal labor, poor living and working conditions and a general unscientific approach to farming seemed to be the perpetual problem.

For farmers facing years of such ridicule, the emotional strain took its toll. Faced by a growing cultural image that identified farmers not as stout agrarians, but as “hicks,” “hayseeds” and other derogatory terms, farmers slowly acculturated in a number of ways.¹⁸ First, tired of the criticism, older farmers defended all the more their farming methods and returned the antagonism by pointing out ways in which urban living based on scientific rationalism failed to live up to particular rural standards such as community, family and religion. Second, farmers clung more so to the agrarian myth: the idea that farming created morally superior people who acted as the backbone of the nation. Third, after farmers realized the criticism would not stop, even after pointing out flaws in industrialized urban living and denoting the advantages of rural living, American farmers

¹⁷ Bruce Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How it Flourished and What it Cost* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2002), 120.

¹⁸ Paul H. Johnstone, “Old Ideals Versus New Ideas in Farm Life,” in *Farmers in a Changing World: 1940 Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington: USGPO, 1940), 145.

turned toward industrialization and proving to all of their urban critics that they too could excel at industrialization and scientific, rational methods of production. The push by politicians and urban leaders to get farmers into scientific and business-based farming started with the turn of the twentieth century. This early effort is well-described by Deb Fitzgerald in her analysis of early corporate farms on the Great Plains, but, it was not until after World War II when farmers of every size in every region took up the ideals of business.¹⁹ They took up the ideals of business and science so readily and quickly in the post-World War II period that by the 1960s rural sociologists noted that “the farmer has now taken his place with other businessmen as a user of production credit, a contractor of production services, an employer of workers, and a user of systematic accounts and records.”²⁰ Keeping in mind all of the previously noted reasons for adopting new production methods (ending back-breaking labor, improving economic stability, developing a better standard of living, and gaining leisure time) most farmers came to realize that the benefits of industrialized farming clearly outweighed the deficits. The total mobilization for victory in World War II that forced farmers to play a key part by increasing total food production using fewer resources and far less labor played a major role in convincing most farmers that industrialized farming was the only way to go.

¹⁹ See Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory* and David Danbom, *Born in the Country A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Danbom notes: “What agricultural reformers had desired for nearly a century—that farming would become an enterprise requiring specialized technical knowledge and that farmers would be accomplished, self-confident, and respected professionals—increasingly became reality after World War II.” (248).

²⁰ Donald Durost and Warren R. Bailey, “What’s Happened to Farming,” in *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences, and Alternatives* ed. Richard Rodefeld (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 19. Earl Heady, et. al., *Roots of the Farm Problem: Changing Technology, Changing Capital Use, Changing Labor Needs* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1965), 46. Heady et al noted “the farmers is motivated not only to increase profits but by other considerations as well. Included may be the desire for the prestige of owning new equipments, for example, as opposed to a desire to defend old methods he has been using.” (46)

One further justification for the adoption of industrialized farming techniques arose in the context of the post-World War II period. Farmers continued to worry about the loss of intelligent and talented children to urban jobs just as urban Americans voiced concern over a similar loss of talented future farmers in the early twentieth century. While both urban Americans associated with the Country Life Movement and farm families feared that ambitious farm children would prefer urban occupations and lifestyles over farming, the two groups held this similar fear for quite dissimilar reasons. Urbanites worried that if the most intelligent and ambitious farm children migrated to urban areas, only the less intelligent and less capable would remain, drastically reducing the efficiency and overall production of food. Moreover, rural and urban Americans both feared of the political and cultural effects of a rural population, supposedly the backbone of democracy, drained of its best and brightest. Many farm families, however, worried that urban careers would, in most cases, take their children far from them to distant cities. As the post-World War II economy boomed, opening up high-paying white- and blue-collar jobs in urban centers throughout America, this fear became much more of a reality for farm parents.

In order to confront the temptation of urban careers and lifestyles farm families could turn to but one solution: make farming an easier, higher paying, and higher status job. These families believed they could fulfill this task only by implementing industrialized farming techniques as they became available. Delegates of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference listened to dairy farmer Martin Salm of Calumet County, Wisconsin explain at their convention in 1951 that the only way “to keep the kids down

on the farm” was “to make rural living just as attractive as urban life.”²¹ In doing so, farming became less-physically demanding and provided an increase in economic return which allowed for a better lifestyle. Since the new techniques often required special knowledge or advanced training, farming gained status and could be viewed more like any other business.²²

By the start of the post-World War II period, it became evident to millions of farmers that industrialized farming offered more control and stability over production, improved quality of life, increased income, reduced labor demand, increased leisure time to pursue mass culture, and helped improved status. Taken together, this collection of improvements for farm living meant that farm parents could hold some hope that they would not lose their children to urban America. Only when farmers caught up with the rapid changes in mass urban culture and the rapidly improving standard of living could they hope to keep family members from leaving for urban centers.

With so many reasons for farmers to pursue modernization and industrialization all that prevented farmers from implementing new technologies were the lack of capital and the availability of the technologies themselves. Both the Great Depression and World War II delayed these in agriculture. The Great Depression reduced agricultural producers to a level of subsistence which prevented the use of the very limited capital for expansion purposes. World War II, on the other hand, created demand for farm products which provided farmers with bountiful capital, but because of the war, agricultural technology lapsed as the American industry focused almost entirely on war-related

²¹ George Dugan, “Farm Home Hailed as Nation’s ‘Heart’,” *New York Times* (Oct. 21, 1951).

²² “New Farming Era,” *New York Times* (Jan. 27, 1946) and “New Era in Farm Living,” *New York Times* (Nov. 25, 1946).

goods. Finally with the end of the war, the conditions aligned to allow for rapid development of farm technologies coupled with fast adoption of such new technologies by farmers, in the process creating the post-war agricultural revolution.

To best understand the extent of this influential agricultural revolution we must first understand the revolution itself. Almost every aspect of the production process changed as a result of the development and adoption of new technologies. Changes on the farm fall into five categories: mechanical developments, changes in plant genetics and soil amendments, the expansion of electricity to rural America, improvements in all-weather roads, and expansion of radio and television. These last two did not necessarily change anything on the farm directly, but combined they altered the atmosphere in which farmers made decisions about production and also changed farm people's lives.

Development and implementation of the gasoline powered tractor experienced fits and starts from the turn of the 20th century until the start of the post-World War II agricultural revolution. World War I propelled commodity prices to record levels which provided incentive to a number of farmers to purchase the earliest versions of the tractor. This new mechanical power promised more production in less time while also making fieldwork less arduous. Unfortunately, those early tractors lacked effective pulling power and often experienced breakdowns compounded by the lack of qualified service and repair personnel. Moreover, the 1920s farm depression and the Great Depression effectively stalled the adoption of tractors. Nonetheless, by 1940, U.S. farmers owned a total of 1.57 million tractors; a considerable number, yet representing only one tractor per four farms. Moreover, tractor ownership was concentrated in relatively wealthier areas

such as the Midwest. The South saw little adoption of tractors until the 1950s and 1960s.²³

World War II provided a new opportunity for farmers to explore tractor use with commodity prices boost by the war. Unfortunately for farmers, many of their demands for tractors went unfulfilled as industries shifted to production of tanks, airplanes and other war vehicles; limiting tractor production to under 1 million for the entire war period.²⁴ Still, tractor ownership increased to 2.35 million across the U.S. by 1945. But again, considering the number of farms in the U.S. this number represented only slightly more than one tractor for every three farms.²⁵ As late as 1950 only 47 percent of farms reported tractor use.²⁶ Moreover, the fact that farmers used over 4.1 million mules as late as the mid-1950s indicated that tractors had not taken reign as the king of farm production power. However, the persistence of food shortages overseas through the 1940s, the advent of the Korean War and the general international tension during the Cold War all created stimulus to market demand for vital farm commodities, providing added incentive to farmers to find a way to purchase a tractor to increase production for the market. Throughout the early 1950s, at the height of the transition from animal to tractor power, farmer demand for tractors ran so high dealers could not keep any in stock and often experienced a backlog of orders.²⁷

²³ John T. Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975), 252.

²⁴ Robert C. Williams, *Fordson, Farmall, and Poppin' Johnny: A History of the Farm Tractor and Its Impact on America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 109.

²⁵ Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive*, 252.

²⁶ Nelson, *American Farm Life*, 33.

²⁷ "Tractor Hoarding Laid to Farmer," *New York Times* (July 26, 1950).

Farmers had an affinity for tractors as soon as they became readily available and farmers had the means with which to purchase them. Quickly farmers learned of the labor saving advantages of cultivating fields with tractor power as opposed to animal power. In the late 1940s, a tractor saved around 850 labor hours per year when compared to the labor needs of operating with animal power.²⁸ Tractors meant a reduction not just in total work hours, but in the most grueling and physically demanding work. This also eliminated the feeding and care for work animals. In fieldwork, tractors moved the operator from either walking behind or riding the implement which was a bouncy and jarring ride, to the tractor which used large inflatable tires that absorbed much of the bounce. By 1946, many tractors featured a spring loaded seat introduced by the Massey-Harris Tractor Company that smoothed bone-jarring bumps to gentle hiccups.²⁹

At a time of labor shortage, tractors provided a way for farmers to avoid the issue of hired labor altogether. C. Erwin Fruden, president of the Society of Automotive Engineers, addressed this issue and, in the process, denoted the increasing impact of urban wage levels on rural wages, indicating the increasing mobility of the post-war period. “There is marked shortage of farm labor now and, with the spiraling urban wage scales, it bids fair to become even greater as there is little hope of equaling such competition.”³⁰ Ted Hamilton, a prominent Missouri farmer in Saline County, explained the labor problem in a letter to a friend in Germany. “Farming here in America, like any of our other businesses, is faced with a constantly increasing problem of labor shortage.

²⁸ “Farm Mechanization,” *New York Times* (May 24, 1948).

²⁹ “‘Velvet Ride’ Tractor Seat Will Ease Farmer’s Jolts,” *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 3, 1946).

³⁰ Bert Pierce, “Farm Tool Lack Tied to Food Costs,” *New York Times* (Jan. 12, 1948).

Farm help is practically unobtainable.”³¹ He then went on to proudly explain how his use of newly available tractors and their implements reduced labor needs while also making the work much easier.

Because of this problem of inefficient labor we are turning more and more to machinery to get our work done. For instance, my brother and I actually cultivate 400 acres and the only help we have hired in the last two years was my own two boys to run tractors during the rush season. We own three large tractors which can pull four 14 inch plows each at one time in normal soils. We use four row corn planters and plant 40 to 50 acres of corn per day and we cultivate our corn with four row cultivators. And finally, the corn is picked with a machine mounted on one of the tractors and it picks the corn two rows at a time. The same is true of wheat. We harvest our wheat with a machine we call a ‘combine’ which cuts it and thrashes it at the same time. Once the corn or wheat is harvested we load it into trucks or storage bins using elevators. In short, we do almost all our work riding around on a tractor or standing beside some sort of a machine guiding it in the work.³²

The mechanical cotton picker provides another example of the labor reducing benefit of newly available mechanical power. For hundreds of years the southern economy depended upon cotton revenue and hence, on laborers to harvest cotton. While these migrant workers or tenant farmers received terribly low wages, preventing them from escaping abject poverty, such wages still comprised a sizeable portion of all cotton raising costs. The mechanical cotton picker allowed cotton growers to reduce their expenses by \$25 per bale while also reducing harvest time and reducing their dependence on a workforce that would leave or strike if they felt slighted.³³

Beyond reducing the need for non-family or outside labor, farm families gained time to do other chores or even to establish some leisure time. Ted Hamilton, the

³¹ T.H. Hamilton to Klaus Bremicker, March 13, 1955, File 76, T.M. Hamilton Papers, WHMC.

³² Ibid.

³³ Vernon Vine, “The Farm Revolution Picks Up Speed,” *New York Times* (June 30, 1946).

Missouri farmer discussed earlier, developed a considerable amount of leisure time as a result of quickly adopting tractor power to his farm operation. With this new-found leisure time, Hamilton took time to study insects and plants as well as develop long-lasting friendships with people from other nations through constant letter writing.³⁴

The promise of leisure became such a powerful influence in the decision to switch to tractor power that tractor companies quickly learned to play upon such motivating factors through advertisements. One 1957 Allis Chalmers ad in *The Saturday Evening Post* focused on this benefit of leisure time. The ad explained that because the Merle Jones family of Missouri adopted modern machinery such as tractors they could handle more acres yet work less. The ad then directly noted:

This progress has brought not only better farming, but also better living. The Jones children—Dick, Linda, and Merlyn—enjoy new opportunities to be active in school and youth programs. In fact, the whole family has more time and energy for church, community and family life.³⁵

The adoption of tractor power also meant farmers gained more stability in the often unstable production process. When using animals, fieldwork took much longer to complete and thus became more susceptible to bad weather, delaying fieldwork which only increased costs and often resulted in lower income brought on by decreased payment for lower-quality crops harvested beyond their prime harvesting condition. Adopting tractors also meant farmers opened up fields previously dedicated to the food supply for mules or horses used for fieldwork. This allowed farmers to plant more acreage for commodities destined for the market rather than domestic animal consumption. From

³⁴ Hamilton's collection at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection includes an extensive file of letters.

³⁵ "Family Farming-1957," Allis Chalmers ad in *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 24, 1957, found in File 1152, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

1917 to 1948, some 55 million acres previously dedicated to food and pasture for work animals became new lands for growing corn, wheat or cotton or raising beef or pigs; all intended solely for the market.³⁶

Moreover, farmers adjusted the way in which they grew crops, allowing for a further increase in productivity. The case of corn proves particularly illustrative. Farmers had long planted corn in row widths of 42 inches. That tradition took awhile to end, but eventually other farmers learned what one farmer, James F. Holderman, discovered; corn could be planted in narrower rows, effectively increasing the amount of corn a farmer could grow on a fixed number of acres. After buying a tractor, Holderman modified his corn planter to plant 21 inch rows. After all, “the only reason corn has been planted in rows forty-two inches apart all these years is because that was the width of a yoke of oxen.”³⁷

For farmers, the tractor offered not only a means to ease the workload or increase production; it offered a way for farmers to improve upon their low status. Purchasing a tractor signified to local neighbors that the farmer took farming seriously and thus should be taken seriously. After all, only the most professional farmer would invest a considerable amount of money into a complex machine. The tractor also showed distant urban Americans that the farmer believed in the use of technology to increase production. It showed urban Americans who often portrayed farm people as backwards and uneducated that farmers could also act like modern businessmen.³⁸ Holderman, the

³⁶ “Farm Mechanization,” *New York Times* (May 24, 1948).

³⁷ William Barry Furlong, “Chemical Revolution on the Farm,” *New York Times* (October 4, 1959).

³⁸ Williams, *Fordson, Farmall, and Poppin’ Johnny*, 132. A good examination of the role of status in driving agricultural development is Alan Marcus, *Agricultural Science and the Quest for Legitimacy*:

innovative corn farmer discussed earlier, again exemplifies the thought process behind technological adoption. “Farming is a science and a profession *today*.”³⁹

Urban Americans took notice of the farm revolution and of the American farmer’s quest for mechanical advancements. The *New York Times* inventoried recently invented farm equipment that eased the physical demands of farming and improved the productivity of farmers. The cotton picker, aided by chemical defoliants, reduced total production costs by roughly half. Flame-throwing weed burners attached to tractors made the human-powered hoe obsolete. Beet harvesters removed the physically demanding labor from harvesting while also combining four steps into one process; loosening the soil, pulling the beet, cutting off the leaves, and throwing the beet into a wagon. Potato harvesters went one step further by placing potatoes directly in bags intended for consumers. Meanwhile, “peanut shellers that can do in an hour what a man can do by hand in 300 hours have been perfected.” Urban Americans voiced satisfaction as they noticed that farmers increasingly made decisions on the basis that “economics favors more machinery.” The *New York Times* concluded: “these new machines mean less drudgery for farmers and their families; better incomes; more leisure, and more widespread enjoyment of modern amenities.”⁴⁰ Because of their rapid adoption of new mechanical technologies, farmers were being welcomed into the modern world.

Back down on the farm, the tractor provided some hope to farm families facing the continued (but recently accelerating) trend of farm children permanently migrating to

Farmers, Agricultural Colleges, and Experiment Stations, 1870-1890 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985).

³⁹ William Barry Furlong, “Chemical Revolution on the Farm,” *New York Times* (October 4, 1956). Italics added.

⁴⁰ Vernon Vine, “The Farm Revolution Picks Up Speed,” *New York Times* (June 30, 1946).

urban areas. World War II not only introduced many rural young people to exciting places far from home, but provided many with high-paying defense jobs as part of the war effort. This added pull only made farm parents to seek all the more means of keeping children interested in farming. What better than a highly complicated machine that improved production and raised the status of farmers while also greatly reducing physically demanding work?⁴¹ The question of whether or not the tractor succeeded in keeping farm kids interested in farming will be addressed in the next chapter.

Farmers, tired of years of difficult work, became so readily convinced of the ability of tractors to raise their standard of living that in the 1950s they sold off mules and horses at such a rate that the U.S. Department of Agriculture, by 1960, stopped recording their numbers. This is remarkable considering that as late as 1948 mules outnumbered tractors by a considerable margin. This rapid shift signified the close of a chapter in the history of American agriculture and the triumph of an entirely new era, power agriculture.

In much the same way as the tractor revolution and for many of the same reasons, the genetic and chemical revolutions drastically changed the nature of farming after World War II. The combination of hybridization of seeds, implementation of herbicides and pesticides as well as the development of fertilizers caused the largest growth of productivity in agricultural plants ever to occur. Similar to its impact on plants, the burgeoning knowledge of genetics revolutionized farm animal productivity. The continuation of selective breeding of farm animals as well as the new application of penicillin, available in large quantities for low cost only after World War II, reduced the

⁴¹ Williams, *Fordson, Farmall and Poppin' Johnny*, 140.

impact of sickness, allowing farm animals to gain weight and yield more offspring or commodities such as eggs or milk.

In 1926, Henry Wallace successfully developed hybrid seeds when he learned that corn plants with better traits such as more productivity or improved drought resistance could be developed from seeds derived from the mating of two different strains or types of corn. However, it wasn't until 1935 when he produced seeds on a massive scale. Respected as an agriculturalist in Iowa, corn growers in that state became early believers in the benefits of the hybrid seeds developed by Wallace. However, it was not until the World War II period and after that corn growers in the rest of the nation took notice.⁴² By then, farmers learned that hybrid corn increased yields by 25 to 50 percent while minimally raising costs.⁴³

Science had not only changed the very nature of corn, but by the post-World War II period it offered a number of additives to augment the growing process, all in the name of increasing production, reducing costs for farming, or making farming less susceptible to the vagaries of nature which had for centuries tormented farmers. Post-World War II agriculture saw a boom in the development and application of new chemicals to row crop production. As one historian noted, "U.S. farm use of chemical pesticides only became massive after World War II."⁴⁴ Fertilizer use across the U.S. rose from 10 million tons in 1940 to 25 million tons by 1960, the largest increase in American history.⁴⁵

⁴² Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive*, 264 and Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 19.

⁴³ "Dr. George Shull, Botanist, is Dead," *New York Times* (Sept. 20, 1954).

⁴⁴ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

The simple explanation for this chemical revolution is that the chemicals had become readily available after World War II. It was the war itself which pushed chemical production. The ingredients for explosives and ammunition were the same as those that helped plants to grow faster, larger, and stronger. Insecticides developed from the same materials that, when formulated differently, produced gas weapons.⁴⁶ With wartime need for such chemicals, American industry developed cost-effective means of production. A vital component in bombs used in World War II and the Korean War, the U.S. heavily produced nitrogen for such purposes; only after the bombs were no longer needed did chemical companies make the switch to nitrogen formulated for fertilizer.⁴⁷ Developments in the production process, again brought on by wartime needs, reduced the cost of one pound of DDT from \$12.44 in 1944 to \$.50 in 1950.⁴⁸ When the war ended, the military no longer needed massive quantities of chemicals, but the chemical industry found a second market ready and willing to purchase any available stock.

This short answer only explains the development of supply; we need to understand why farmers so willingly took up fertilizers and chemicals after World War II.⁴⁹ After all, between 1945 and 1972, pesticide use alone increased 1000%.⁵⁰ Another way to look at it, in 1940 farmers spent \$1.5 million on herbicides. By 1962, they spent

⁴⁶ Nicolas Rasmussen, "Plant Hormones in War and Peace: Science, Industry, and Government in the Development of Herbicides in 1940s America," *Isis* 92 (2001), 292.

⁴⁷ William Blair, "Nitrogen Brings Vast Crop Gains," *New York Times* (March 8, 1958).

⁴⁸ Gale E. Peterson, "The Discovery and Development of 2,4-D," *Agricultural History* 41 (1967), 251.

⁴⁹ For further analysis into farm demand for new technologies see, J.L. Anderson, "Industrializing the Corn Belt: Iowa Farmers, Technology, and the Midwestern Landscape, 1945-1972," (Ph.D. Diss., Iowa State University, 2006).

⁵⁰ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 24.

over \$270 million.⁵¹ Had such a demand been present before the war chemical companies would have done everything in their power to satisfy such demand.

Again, the specific timing of events shapes the path of history. The combination of a Great Depression and then a world war delayed the development and adoption of new technologies. Yet, as the nation went through war, farmers were pressed to maximize output. When the war ended, the demand for maximum farm output did not cease. Instead, because of the extent of destruction that occurred in Europe, American political leaders pressed farmers to maintain output. Throughout the 1950s, Europeans suffered from nutritional and caloric deficiencies due to the lack of food. American consumers experienced the continuation of war-time rationing well-beyond the war years. When rationing ended domestic consumer demand rose so quickly and to such an extent that supplies could not keep pace, leading to rising food costs.

Faced with dramatically rising domestic and world demand and hearing the stories of sickness and death brought on by under- or mal-nutrition in Europe even after the end of the war, American farmers re-dedicated themselves to the cause of feeding all of the people of the world. The reality of post-war Europe reinforced the Malthusian fear among farmers and nonfarmers alike that nations would not be able to sufficiently feed expanding populations.⁵² James G. Patton, the President of the National Farmers Union explained his concern about feeding the booming population. “I do not see population tapering off enough in the next few years, the way the world population is growing now,

⁵¹ Peterson, “The Discovery and Development of 2-4,D,” 243.

⁵² Thomas Malthus, 19th century philosopher, first noted that food production experiences linear growth while population experiences much more explosive exponential growth. Malthus feared that population would overwhelm food supply by the mid 1800s. His predictions failed because they were based on the static projection of dynamic societal characteristics. See Howard W. Beers, “Rural-Urban Differences: Some Evidence from Public Opinion Polls,” *Rural Sociology* 18 (1953), 3 and Sherman E. Johnson, “Farm Science and Citizens,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1943-1947* (Washington: USGPO, 1947), 920.

we will be doing well to produce enough food and fiber to keep up with the population growth.”⁵³ Coincidentally, the American war industry provided to farmers its unintended bi-products; pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. In 1960, Stuart Spradling, the director of research for the Missouri Farmers Association Oil Company voiced this belief in chemicals to ensure an adequate food supply in the coming years.

Couple [the fact that pests take 12% of total farm output] with census estimates calling for a population of 50,000,000 more people in this country by 1975, and the fact that cities, suburbs, factories, airports and highways are taking about 1,000,000 acres out of farm production each year, and it becomes obvious that new farming practices will be needed to feed our population just fifteen years away. Pesticide usage is destined to play an increasingly important role in keeping our nation fed.⁵⁴

These chemicals and the belief in science helped relieve the Malthusian fear of population growth beyond the world’s ability to provide food.⁵⁵ Moreover, the belief in science led many scientists and farmers alike to ignore the unintended consequences of heavy reliance on chemicals. Not until the 1960s did questioning occur of such heavy chemical use.

A few recent developments in particular guided farmers to not only trust science, but also to depend upon it and truly believe in it and not question it or worry about possible negative environmental consequences. After all, adoption of a technology is not predicated alone on availability of the new invention; there must be demand for the new technology. Farmers did not justify increasing their use of new chemical additives solely on the moral grounds of increasing the food supply to meet the demands of a growing

⁵³ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd sess., (Washington: USGPO, 1960), 196.

⁵⁴ “Control Those Pests!” *Missouri Farmer* (June 1960), 14.

⁵⁵ William Barry Furlong, “Chemical Revolution on the Farm,” *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1959).

world population. In the end farmers had to have individual motivations. They were, after all, farming to make a living and support families. Moreover, the simple availability of fertilizer cannot fully explain the rapid adoption of chemical additives in the immediate post-war years. Indicative of not only rising availability, but rapidly increasing demand as well, American fertilizer use such as nitrogen, phosphate and potash increased from 1.7 million tons in 1940 to over 22 million tons by 1959.⁵⁶ In the decade between 1942 and 1952 alone, fertilizer use doubled.⁵⁷

The way in which farmers approached farming became one of the main causes behind this unbelievable growth in fertilizer use. For hundreds and even thousands of years farmers approached their occupation as a means of providing for the family. But as urban markets grew, pressing upon farmers a new market demand for food, farmers slowly transitioned to production for the market. As they saw themselves as producers for the market, farmers increasingly saw themselves as businessmen and their farm work as a business, and less as fulfilling or following a preferred lifestyle. For the millions of farmers taking on this new attitude, fertilizers simply made business sense because they increased income more so than they increased costs. For each dollar spent on fertilizers or other chemical additives, output rose by three to five dollars.⁵⁸ One farmer, James Kuhn of Warrenville, Illinois, justified using three different fertilizers in three different

⁵⁶ Don E. Albrecht and Steve H. Murdock, *The Sociology of U.S. Agriculture: An Ecological Perspective* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 94 and Furlong, "Chemical Revolution on the Farm," *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1959).

⁵⁷ Furlong, "Chemical Revolution on the Farm," *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1959).

⁵⁸ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 24.

applications according to this new identity. “We’re business men and we try to run our business like any other business man.”⁵⁹

The annual Missouri Corn Growing Contest, started in the 1940s after the Missouri Farmers Association began producing and selling its own brand of hybrid seeds, provides further insight into the developing business approach among farmers. In 1952, contest participants averaged 103 bushels of corn per acre, a considerable improvement from the state average of 40 bushels per acre. MFA leaders played on the rational business concepts that many farmers now depended upon:

Figuring corn at \$1.30 that increased yield of 63 bushels would equal \$82 additional return per acre. Less fertilizer cost of \$22 this leaves a net return of \$60 an acre, over and above the average Missouri corn yield of 40 bushels.⁶⁰

MFA leaders further noted the economic benefits of fertilizers that would make business sense: fertilizer helped corn maintain production despite dry or even drought conditions which helped stabilize income against the vagaries of nature. Leaders also noted that fertilizer was a good investment with a return of four dollars for every dollar of fertilizer spent.⁶¹ So while fertilizers dramatically added monetary costs to farming, they also offered larger returns for farmers while allowing them to gain status as businessmen guided by the values of productivity and application of technology.

In many ways we can view farmers’ adoption of chemicals such as fertilizers but also pesticides and penicillin for animals not just as a means of becoming more businesslike, but as evidence of a belief in science to cure all ills. This 20th century trend

⁵⁹ Furlong, “Chemical Revolution on the Farm,” *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1959).

⁶⁰ “Gentry County Farm Youth Wins Corn Contest With 154.49 Bu,” *Missouri Farmer* (Jan. 1953).

⁶¹ “Gentry County Farm Youth,” *Missouri Farmer* (Jan. 1953) and “Fertilizer Proves Its Worth During the Current Drouth,” *Missouri Farmer* (Nov. 1953).

dramatically intensified in the post-World War II era. Just as nitrogen used in fertilizer first developed out of the necessity to fight World War II, so too, did two other key post-war agricultural chemicals that not only increased productivity, but in the process reshaped the nature of farming. In 1943, 2-4,D became available in the U.S.⁶² During the war it was used to defoliate areas for military purposes. However, immediately after it became available to the public, farmers quickly adopted the chemical to destroy weeds that limited both crop and animal production.⁶³

Towards the end of the war, in 1945, U.S. scientists found a method to greatly increase the production of penicillin, a key drug in the fight against infections which developed as a result of wounds from battle. Farmers quickly learned to use the cheap drug to improve the health of their livestock and other farm animals. In implementing penicillin, farmers made animals less susceptible to illness, helping animals grow faster without the hindrance of illness. In 1930, it took 5 pounds of feed for a chicken to add 1 pound of meat; in 1959, it took 2.4 pounds of feed.⁶⁴ These two scientific advancements, 2-4,D and mass production of penicillin, further industrialized agriculture, and not just for the largest of farms. Rather, even the smallest of farmers could adopt these discoveries, allowing these farms to enjoy their benefits and become more prosperous.

Beyond the fact that all farmers could enjoy the benefits of 2-4,D and penicillin, their rapid and near universal adoption signified a new attitude among farmers regarding science. Long farmers had rejected scientific research-based technology and farming

⁶² Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive*, 273.

⁶³ David Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 116.

⁶⁴ Furlong, "Chemical Revolution on the Farm," *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1959) and Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive*, 275.

techniques. Members of the Country Life Movement, after all, cited this anti-scientific attitude as a cause for concern with the productive capacity of American farmers. But the quick and obvious improvements scientific discoveries and applications had on farm productivity immediately following the war convinced even the most diehard traditionalist that science offered too many blessings and advantages to ignore. The titles of articles from *The Missouri Farmer* and *New York Times* voiced the new belief held by millions of farmers and their newfound dependence on science; “Man Needs Chemicals” and “Farmers Reaping Bumper Crops of Chemicals.”⁶⁵

In fact, this belief in the benefits of science applied to agriculture became almost absolute, showing an unwavering belief in what science has done and what it would do in the future. This is understandable considering that not only had chemicals such as DDT eliminated the impact of pests such as wire and cut worms, but such chemicals effectively ended the need to make two mid-season crop cultivations, greatly reducing farmers’ workloads.⁶⁶ Missouri farmer Richard Collins described cultivating corn before herbicides as an “all day” task.⁶⁷ In the post-war period farmers came to celebrate science at every opportunity. One entry in the 1947 *Yearbook of Agriculture* noted:

In a few years [DDT] has excited the imagination of scientists and laymen alike—and rightly, for it is effective against a wider variety of agricultural pests than any other synthetic insecticide heretofore tested; it gives control

⁶⁵ Jack Hackethorn, “Man Needs Chemicals,” *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 1960) and Jack R. Ryan, “Farmers Reaping Bumper Crop of Chemicals,” *New York Times* (March 20, 1955).

⁶⁶ William Blair, “Nitrogen Brings Vast Crop Gains,” *New York Times* (March 8, 1958). Estimates of the impact of pesticides in reducing crop destruction show the annual loss level reduced from 25% of all crops in 1938 to 12% in 1954, with almost all of that reduction attributed to recently developed chemicals. Furlong, “Chemical Revolution on the Farm,” *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1959).

⁶⁷ Richard Collins, interview by author, 25 March 2005, Clark, Missouri, tape recording, WHMC, Columbia, Missouri.

of those history-old scourges, the body louse, the mosquito, and the fly; and, wonderful to relate, its effect lasts, sometimes as long as a year.⁶⁸

So enamored with the chemical and trusting in science one author suggested that readers apply DDT to surfaces in the kitchen and dining room, “where flies may be attracted by food odors.”⁶⁹

Of course, other post-war developments besides scientific advancements in chemicals led farmers to not only revolutionize farming, but to dramatically alter the way in which they approached farming as well. The electrification of rural America, while beginning as early as the 1910’s, had lagged behind urban America. By 1945, while almost all urban homes enjoyed all of the conveniences of electricity, only 35 percent of rural homes enjoyed such benefits.⁷⁰ However, in what could be considered one of the most influential and rapid changes to occur in agriculture, by 1956, in just eleven years, electricity had reached 96 percent of rural homes. We can attribute this break-neck speed of adoption to two factors. First, the government, through the Rural Electrification Administration, sought to bring farm homes into the modern age in order to raise the standard of living of millions of Americans who, until then, lived in sub-standard circumstances. Second, farmers themselves quickly learned of the wide-ranging benefits electricity provided, particularly to reduce labor demands, so they themselves did all they could to get “hooked up” as soon as possible.

Electricity proved valuable to farm families in two ways, both of which allowed the substitution of mechanical power for human power as well as for improved lighting

⁶⁸ H.L. Haller and Ruth L. Busbey, “The Chemistry of DDT,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1943-1947* (Washington: USGPO, 1947), 616.

⁶⁹ L.S. Henderson, “DDT in the Home,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture*, 646.

⁷⁰ Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 241.

which made work easier and safer. In the farmyard, electricity meant the end of heavy and burdensome daily chores. Feed grinding, moving hay into the mow and getting feed from silos all involved labor intensive work.⁷¹ Through electricity, lighting improved significantly. Where once farmers had to strategically place or constantly carry a lantern in order to make their way throughout the barn to complete chores, electricity allowed farmers to light the entire barn at a flick of a switch. In doing so they not only made farm work safer, but literally freed an arm for work, once dedicated to carrying a lantern. For livestock farming and other animal care-taking, electric lights reduced winter work time by one hour per worker per day.⁷²

The situation of dairy farms best illustrates the impact electricity had on farming. Milking cows on dairy farms without electricity required hours. Yet, when the cows were milked, dairy farmers had no safe means of storing the perishable commodity. Before electricity, dairy farmers stored milk at room temperature until it could be picked up by the local creamery. Moreover, all milk transportation required human power, carrying the milk from the cow to the storage area and then from the storage area to the milk truck in heavy cans. Electricity changed the entire structure of dairy farming by replacing every labor-intensive or time consuming step of the process. Machines, logically named milking machines, gently milked cows, speeding up and simplifying the once time-consuming process. From there, the milkers pumped the milk into a pipeline that ran throughout the barn. A vacuum, operated again by electricity, pulled the milk to a tank. When it came time for the local creamery to pick up the milk, rather than having to carry it in heavy cans, the milk hauler simply had to connect a hose from the tank to

⁷¹ "TVA Area Farms Big Power Users," *New York Times* (April 19, 1959).

⁷² Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*, 15.

the truck where electricity again would pump the milk. One dairy farm, owned by John Stamy of Newville, Pennsylvania, became the awe of *New York Times* writers who marveled that the farm was “almost totally run by electricity.”⁷³

Electricity not only made dairy farming less burdensome, it improved the quality of the product while also changing the structure of dairy farming altogether. Not only did electricity move the milk, electricity operated refrigerators which kept the milk chilled at a safe temperature until pickup.⁷⁴ Moreover, with electricity farmers could have hot water heaters in the barn that allowed them to sanitize all equipment, greatly reducing the incidence of contamination or spoilage. In reducing the labor required and by making the entire process cleaner, dairy farming could flourish into much larger operations.

Indicative of this new trend, the number of farms with milking machines increased more during World War II than any other period.⁷⁵ Electricity allowed dairy farmers to expand beyond a herd of five or ten cows before electricity to a herd of 30, 40, or even 50 cows with electricity. In an interview with *Missouri Farmer* writers in 1957, J.E. Green of Fair Grove, Missouri noted “[electricity] has enabled me to more than double my milk cow herd.”⁷⁶ This created a new opportunity to earn a higher income and thus improve dairy farmers’ standard of living. Under the new system made possible by electricity, farmers could more easily specialize in dairy farming which also reduced costs, again improving farm income and hence, farm standard of living.

⁷³ “Dairyman’s Farm ‘Most Electrified’,” *New York Times* (Aug. 27, 1954).

⁷⁴ “Research Study Opens Door to Missouri Farm Progress,” *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 1953), 8.

⁷⁵ Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive*, 254.

⁷⁶ Richard Collins, “REA Must Not Be Tampered With! Say Farmer-Owners All Over Missouri,” *Missouri Farmer* (Sept. 1957).

Electricity revolutionized not just farm work, but farm living as well. The farm home underwent modernization at a rapid rate immediately following World War II. As late as 1940 only 35 percent of rural homes had electricity.⁷⁷ Until that time, farm families lived in houses that had not measurably changed in 50 or 60 years. Visitors to a 1930s farm home could easily have mistaken it for a farm home from the 1880s. Neither had electricity, which meant that both homes had kerosene lanterns for light, wood stoves for heating, cooking and baking, outhouses for bathrooms and hand-operated pumps for water. This meant poor lighting at night preventing any serious opportunity to study and pursue education after farm work was finished for the day. It also meant a considerable amount of labor on a daily basis to haul firewood and water into the house. Even before morning chores farm families had to haul in firewood and pump water from the well.⁷⁸ Cooking required hours of preparation to stoke the wood stove and was a particularly unenviable job during hot summer months. Preserving foods also took considerable work without the benefit of a refrigerator. Farm women canned food, a labor-intensive task that continued even after the advent of electricity. It also meant that both had their water source and bathroom facilities outside of the house. Not only an inconvenience, the lack of running water in the house also led to sanitary and health issues. When compared to urban housing and standard of living around the 1940s, rural housing was a world away.

Electricity changed all of that. Transmission lines quickly spread throughout rural America after World War II for a couple of reasons. First, the Rural Electrification Administration, since its creation in the early 1930s as one of Franklin Roosevelt's New

⁷⁷ R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 115.

⁷⁸ Joann Vanek, "Work, Leisure, and Family Roles: Farm Households in the United States, 1920-1955," *Journal of Family History* 5 (Winter 1980), 426.

Deal programs, sought to improve the standard of living of rural America by bringing electricity to the millions of farmsteads across the country. Moreover, not until after World War II and the Great Depression could farm people afford the cost of transmission lines.⁷⁹ Finally, electricity usage bloomed in rural America after World War II because it provided the easiest and most effective way of improving standard of living. Spurred by a vastly higher standard of living of urban areas, farm families sought to take advantage of the same technological advances. By 1950 rural electrification expanded to 88 percent of rural residents.⁸⁰ By 1960, rural electrification reached 98 percent, for all practical purposes all of rural America.⁸¹ In the span of 20 years, over 63% of all rural residents adopted electricity.

With electricity, farm homes gained all of the modern conveniences and comforts of an urban home. Farm families could now use electricity for lighting, allowing for extended hours of education. Electricity also ended many of the labor-intensive duties of home care. Clothes washing used to require an entire day, but now could be done in a few hours with much less human effort. So popular had electric washing machines become that 80 percent of American farms had one by 1960.⁸² Cleaning the house was similarly simplified with the electric vacuum. More importantly, electricity supplied the power to pump and heat water, improving the sanitary conditions of rural residents while also providing added convenience. The amount of effort farm women had to spend on

⁷⁹ Kline, *Consumers in the Country*, 241.

⁸⁰ Lowry Nelson, *American Farm Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 35.

⁸¹ Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 115. The remaining 2 percent of unelectrified farms existed mainly in the extremely remote mountain west where transmission line costs were still prohibitive.

⁸² T. E. Hienton and J.P. Schaenzer, "Farmers Use Electricity," in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 78.

food preparation fell dramatically with the adoption of electric stoves, refrigerators and freezers (nonetheless farm women's workloads did not decline). Indicative of the popularity of the newly available power source and part of the post-war consumerism trend, a survey conducted by the Edison Electric Institute noted that each farm family represented a \$150 market in electric appliances and that food freezers, water systems, ranges and water heaters led in demand.⁸³ Appliance manufacturers celebrated: "There is enough work yet to be done in mechanizing and electrifying farms to keep the country's economy running at top speed for years."⁸⁴ One farm family from Trenton, Missouri wrote to their Congressional representative: "Give us light." "Light through electricity is as essential [sic] to us as meat is to your food diet."⁸⁵

While the particular electric tools implemented were similar in both the barn/farmyard and the farm home in that they were labor saving devices, the ways in which farm people and electricity boosters portrayed these devices and their purposes were quite different. Electricity, more so than any other post-war revolutionary development on the farm, became gender specific in the ways in which people understood the benefits. On the one hand, electricity helped farm men become more productive and business-like. Boosters described the same electricity providing the same labor-saving power as easing the burden for farm women. Various editions of The Department of Agriculture's *Yearbook of Agriculture* from the post-war period illustrate the gendered lens through which people viewed electricity. One article, discussing the

⁸³ "Electrified Farms Push Appliances," *New York Times* (Oct. 29, 1949).

⁸⁴ "Vast Farm Market Seen for Appliances," *New York Times* (Dec. 22, 1949).

⁸⁵ Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Willard to James Kem, January 6, 1947, File 3368, James Preston Kem Papers, WHMC.

potential power of electricity, noted: “Effective use means increasing production with less human labor, lightening the housewife’s burden in the farm kitchen and laundry, and improving general living conditions.”⁸⁶ The author, although not intentionally, subconsciously separated the benefits of electricity according to gender. For men, assumed to be the dominant producer, electricity meant increasing productivity. For women, electricity was portrayed by officials not as a tool for improving their productivity, but as an independent power source that could save women from work burdens. Clearly the electricity revolution exposed the underlying or assumed cultural concept of gender that guided farm life. Another article from the USDA’s *Yearbook of Agriculture* aimed at noting the new business-like nature of farming also revealed gendered concepts. “The farmstead is the livestock farmer’s place of business—*his* factory.”⁸⁷ Here again the author stated an underlying cultural concept of electricity’s gendered application; that the farmstead is a man’s factory or means of increasing the productivity of his labor while women were seen not as producers, but as needing salvation from burdensome work. Many rural reformers viewed electricity as a means of keeping farm women satisfied with country living while men performed the productive work.

But why was electricity approached in such heavily gendered terms while other technological advances appeared to have little or no gendered language? More than any other post-war technological change, electricity and its various tools, while universal in their adoption, also cleanly divided between the already established gendered spheres

⁸⁶ John H. Rixse, Jr., “Electricity Comes to Farms,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: GPO, 1960), 69.

⁸⁷ “Progress at the Farmstead,” in *After a Hundred Years: The Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington: U.S. GPO, 1962), 411. Emphasis added by author.

present in farm life. For men, whose domain or sphere on the farm almost universally included fieldwork, daily farm chores or non-household work, electricity became applied in ways that, while reducing labor, also increased the profit of the farm. Women, who contributed considerable amounts of labor in the typically men's sphere, nonetheless were also placed in charge of the household and childrearing. These tasks, unlike those typical of the men's sphere, were not recognized as providing an income.⁸⁸ So while women's typical responsibilities provided contributions to the farm, such contributions were not recognized as having as much of a monetary or market value. And as farming caught up with the rest of America in terms of valuing the business of producing for the market, the line between men's and women's work became more distinct in the post-World War II period.

In many ways, the condition of rural roads, their development after World War II, the way in which rural residents viewed them, and the impact these roads had on residents all mirrored the situation of electricity at that time. As with electricity, the presence, or more accurately non-existence of good roads, drew a clear division between rural and urban standards of living. Those with good roads could travel to schools, markets, stores and areas of entertainment. Those without good roads became confined to their home for weeks at a time when weather reduced dirt roads to impassible mud tracks. The development of rural roads, similar to the development of electric service to rural residents, exploded in the post-World War II era after initial attempts in the 1910s and 1920s failed to achieve desired results. While present and easily available to urban residents well before the Great Depression, the development of roads in rural areas

⁸⁸ It is important to note that women's work on the farm in fact often provided important sources of income that saw the family through difficult economic times. Women, often in charge of egg production and marketing, provided substantial income, especially during economic downturns.

became stalled, first by the depression, then by war.⁸⁹ By the late 1940s, a clear divide arose between the haves and the have-nots.

This division in road conditions, much like the availability of electricity, determined many aspects of residents' lives. With good roads, farmers could easily get commodities to markets, send children to more effective consolidated schools, have access to better health care options, visit larger urban areas for periodic purchases and entertainment, and generally become integrated into mass American culture. Those living in areas of poor, undeveloped roads, however, experienced much the opposite. Farmers could not deliver commodities to market, either when the prices rose or when their crops reached peak market condition. A saying in rural Iowa went: "The Iowa farmer cannot haul to market when the market is high; he must haul to market when the roads are dry."⁹⁰ Because of this, bad roads cost millions of individual farmers large amounts of potential income. Moreover, in terms of standard of living, bad roads meant that many school districts could not consolidate their services, if residents supported such consolidation, which depended on easy transportation of students to a central location.⁹¹ Instead, rural children became stuck in the stereotypical one-room schools with one class of students ranging from first to eighth or ninth grade that prevented classes beyond the basic math, reading and language arts.⁹² Poor rural roads also meant that rural residents could not go to urban areas to enjoy the movie theater or library. W. A. Arnote, a farmer

⁸⁹Wayne E. Fuller, *RFD: The Changing Face of Rural America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 198. Hal Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) has an excellent chapter on early road improvement attempts.

⁹⁰ Fuller, *RFD*, 181.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 181.

⁹² Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 114.

from Polo, Missouri, complained in a letter to Governor Forrest Smith of the isolation caused by bad roads. “A person two or three miles from a state highway is out of luck in bad weather he might as well be twenty or thirty miles for he can’t get to the highway.”⁹³ In essence, the poor condition of thousands of miles of rural roads prevented the advancement of rural residents as well as their inclusion into the broader American society.

Officials in local, state and national governments realized by the mid-1940s that rural roads needed improvement in order to bring access of markets, public services, health care, entertainment and consolidated schools, all of which would improve the standard of living of millions of rural residents. The Federal Highway Act of 1944 authorized the federal government to spend \$1.5 billion over three years to bring rural roads up to date. While passed in the name of improving the “farm-to-market network,” improving rural roads addressed many isolation-related problems.⁹⁴ To augment the development of rural roads, states could match the funds provided by the federal government by either raising sales or gasoline taxes or passing bond issues. In 1946, the Missouri House of Representatives, by a vote of 100-3, passed a bill to use two million dollars per year of the post-war reserve fund for rural roads. This meant \$750 per mile of county roads in state aid.⁹⁵ Another example of states’ growing interest in seeing the

⁹³ W. A. Arnote to Forrest Smith, 1 May 1949, File 4500, Forrest Smith Papers, WHMC.

⁹⁴ Wayne Darrow’s *Washington Farmletter: A Private Weekly Report*, September 8, 1945), found in File 1432, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁹⁵ “State Aid System For Rural Roads Goes to Governor,” *Mexico [Mo.] Evening Ledger* (June 26, 1946), found in File 2340, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

improvement of rural roads was the State of Georgia, which, in 1957, sold bonds totaling \$17,500,000 for the sole purpose of rural roads.⁹⁶

The post-war rash of development of rural roads and the money dedicated to the purpose of better rural roads is quite different from ways in which residents and citizens pursued rural road development and maintenance before World War II. In thousands of rural communities across the United States, the paltry amount of tax revenue dedicated to road development and maintenance severely hampered any improvement. Further, since many rural residents often lacked the money to pay for such local taxes, however low, communities would allow residents the option of paying the tax or working on local roads a few days out of the year. While a thoughtful option, it nonetheless led to often shoddy roads due to the inexperience of farmers in building and maintaining roads. These farmers often lacked the knowledge of drainage, rainwater management or bridge construction.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, thanks to the growing recognition of the importance of dependable roads, road conditions quickly improved in the post-World War II period. In 1921, 13 percent of about 3 million miles of rural roads had surfacing of some sort that made them usable, no matter the weather. As late as 1941, only 39 percent of rural roads had been surfaced.⁹⁸ But after World War II, the boom in road improvement occurred. By 1959, over 69 percent of rural roads had surfacing.⁹⁹

With new, high-quality roads, farm families gained easier access to modern conveniences. But most importantly, new rural roads allowed for a revolution in the

⁹⁶ “Georgia Rural Road Unit Plans July 23 Sale of \$17,500,000 Bonds,” *Wall Street Journal* (July 8, 1957).

⁹⁷ Fuller, *RFD*, 179.

⁹⁸ “Rural Roads,” *New York Times* (Oct. 20, 1947).

⁹⁹ Glen V. Fuguitt, “The City and the Countryside,” *Rural Sociology* 28 (1963), 248.

education of rural children. Until rural roads improved, rural schools remained small, serving a handful of students of all ages. This system severely limited educational opportunities for children while yet, also costing rural residents more in taxes per resident than what urban residents paid.

Moreover, since rural districts could not match the pay offered in urban districts, rural schools typically could attract only the most inexperienced teachers who would then leave as soon as possible for higher paying jobs in urban districts. Exemplifying the divide in teacher quality, every one of the 60,000 teachers throughout the entire country in 1947 who had a high school education or less taught in rural districts.¹⁰⁰ High teacher turnover also resulted from the fact that many rural schools could not afford the necessary equipment, let alone quality classrooms, to properly educate their students; resulting in frustrated teachers who again, left for urban districts as soon as possible.¹⁰¹ In an average year, rural schools experienced a 40% turnover rate of teachers.¹⁰² One rural science teacher, having no equipment with which to teach students, commented: “I guess you’d call this the horse and buggy way of teaching. The atomic age? Why, we’re not out of the Civil War yet.”¹⁰³

The problems of rural education had not become a serious issue until the post-World War II era when the amount of money spent on education in urban areas rapidly increased and saw a corresponding improvement in the education provided. Urban school districts began classes geared toward college or urban white-collar workforce

¹⁰⁰ Fine, “Conditions Tragic,” *New York Times* (Feb. 19, 1947).

¹⁰¹ Leonard Buder, “Reorganization of Rural Schools,” *New York Times* (Sep. 11, 1949).

¹⁰² Fine, “Conditions Tragic,” *New York Times* (Feb. 19, 1947).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

preparation, drawing increasing distinction to the substandard and unequal education provided in rural districts.¹⁰⁴ And as more rural children and entire farm families forced to leave farming migrated to urban areas after World War II, the poor education provided in rural areas became increasingly noticeable.

Some remaining in rural areas took note of the problems experienced by rural migrants and sought to reform the rural education system to place it on a competitive plane with its urban counterpart. Farm families, however, could not compete with more wealthy urban areas in the tax revenues that often determined the quality of education provided in the school district. In a trend that continues yet today, poverty persisted at a higher rate in rural areas than in urban areas. In 1965, 31 percent of all farm families lived in poverty while only 15 percent of nonfarm families did so.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the 1950s, farm wage rates lagged behind the real wage growth of urban manufacturing jobs.¹⁰⁶ For farm families, school consolidation became the best solution, and one that became possible only with the post-war rural road programs that improved the transportation system. Generally speaking, a major obstacle to consolidation was farm people wary of having other people control their children's education. But in many areas the lack of good roads stood as the major obstacle to consolidation. With improved rural roads, students could travel longer distances to get to schools. School attendance also improved when surfaced roads replaced dirt or mud roads. In turn, school districts could consolidate schools which would allow them to combine student populations to offer

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Fine, "National School Survey Summary Shows Aid, Public Interest Needed," *New York Times* (Feb. 21, 1947) and Fine, "Education in Review," *New York Times* (Dec. 30, 1951).

¹⁰⁵ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 104.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 109.

individual grade level classes. Moreover, per pupil costs fell with consolidation as buildings could be built to house more students. With larger student bodies, consolidated rural districts could offer specialty classes in languages, technology and vocational preparation already offered in urban districts. For example, in 1959, the Iowa school districts of Troy and Pulaski consolidated into the Bloomfield district. With consolidation, students from Troy and Pulaski could take “physics, chemistry, trigonometry, economics, sociology, geography, advanced civics, shorthand—even driver education.”¹⁰⁷

With students consolidated and rural districts able to create individual grade level classes for elementary grades and separate subject classes in high school, rural districts improved their ability to recruit better teachers.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, with improved efficiency, rural schools could begin to offer more competitive pay to teachers, helping them to retain better instructors who would have otherwise left for urban districts.¹⁰⁹ Education specialists noted that efficiency improved considerably when schools achieved certain enrollment thresholds. Many agreed that elementary schools needed enough students to have at least one teacher per grade. An efficient high school required at least 200 students, but 400 students would provide even more efficiency advantages.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ “Big High Schools Gaining in Iowa,” *New York Times* (Oct. 29, 1961).

¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that teacher retention is no longer an issue in rural areas. The situation is improved, but not resolved.

¹⁰⁹ George H. Munro, “Establishment, Consolidation and Reorganization of School Districts in Holt County, Missouri,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Missouri, 1990), 212.

¹¹⁰ S. J. Knezevich, “The Changing Structure of Public Education in Iowa and Its Relation to the Educational Needs of Rural and Urban Areas,” in *Urban Responses to Agricultural Change* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 181.

Presented with the growing problem of educational deficiencies for rural residents and, for the first time, being offered a means of addressing the problem, namely through school consolidation available in part because of road improvements, states pushed consolidation more rapidly in the post-World War II era than in any other time.¹¹¹ In 1945, the Illinois General Assembly passed House Bill 406, which appropriated additional state funds to expedite the rural school consolidation process.¹¹² In 1948, Missouri passed Senate Bill 307, known as the Reorganization Law of 1948 which also intended to speed up the consolidation process.¹¹³ In 1951, South Carolina took 1092 school districts located in 42 counties and merged them into 104 districts.¹¹⁴ The consolidation trend led to a revolution in the educational structure of America's rural schools. With the push from state governments, the number of small, inadequate rural school districts declined precipitously; replaced with more efficient and productive consolidated schools. For example, in 1948, Missouri had 8,422 school districts. In 1959, the state had 2,629 districts. Illinois experienced even more consolidation as the state went from 11,061 districts to 1,770 over the same period.¹¹⁵ In just ten years the number of one-room schools declined dramatically from over 75,000 in 1948 to around

¹¹¹ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 114.

¹¹² Alan Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union: School Consolidation and Community Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 20.

¹¹³ Munro, "Establishment, Consolidation and Reorganization," (Ph.D. Diss.), 212.

¹¹⁴ Fine, "Education in Review," *New York Times* (Dec. 20, 1951).

¹¹⁵ Knezevich, "The Changing Structure," in *Urban Responses*, 179.

26,000 in 1958.¹¹⁶ Nationwide, the number of school districts declined by 68% in just 15 years between 1945 and 1960.¹¹⁷

As a result of consolidation efforts across the nation due to road improvements and the decline of rural isolationist attitudes, the educational achievements of rural students caught up to those of urban students by the 1970s in what can be considered a revolutionary change for rural America.¹¹⁸ As late as the 1940s, the average educational attainment of rural students was 8 years. Meanwhile, urban students averaged just under 12 years. By 1970, rural students convincingly narrowed the gap by achieving an average attendance of 12.4 years, only a third of a year behind urban students at 12.7 years.¹¹⁹

As if revolutions in electricity, machines, plant and animal production, road improvements and education were not enough for farm families in the post-World War II period, the development and then rapid adoption of a new mass media device of television had further profound impacts on their lives, particularly in integrating rural families into mass culture. Television offered to farm families not just entertainment or a convenient means of obtaining news and information; more importantly it provided a way to become involved in mass culture.

For hundreds of years until the post-World War II period, isolation defined farm living despite the existence of battery-powered radios in the 1920s and 1930s which helped narrow the culture gap between rural and urban people. As late as the 1930s

¹¹⁶ Glen Fuguitt, "The City and the Countryside," *Rural Sociology* 28 (1963), 251.

¹¹⁷ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 114.

¹¹⁸ In fact, in the 1950s, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri, and Iowa had less than 7% of the nation's school-age children, yet they had over 44% of all school districts. Knezevich, "The Changing Structure of Public Education," 179.

¹¹⁹ Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 116.

many farm families had to rely on mail delivery to have any information of the outside world. And, considering the terrible condition of rural roads, the wait for a delivery of mail could sometimes reach two or three weeks. By the 1950s, with almost every farm connected to the electrical grid and a new mass media form available, one much more exciting and entertaining than radio or newspaper, and with farm families enjoying better income and more leisure time, television became the first truly available means of easy access to America's mass culture. Indicating an obvious gap, in 1955, 74 percent of urban residents owned a television while only 42 percent of rural residents enjoyed the new technology. But again, as with education, rural residents narrowed the gap. In 1960, just 5 years later, 89 percent of urban households had a television while rural households came in with a much closer 76 percent.¹²⁰

The rapid adoption of television by farm families changed their lives in two ways. First, the presence of television altered their social habits and created an awareness of an outside world that remained distant until television arrived. Television allowed millions of farm families to become integrated into American mass culture which had come to define the lives of urban residents. Television, more than newspaper, film, or even radio, united the people of the nation into a common experience and national culture.¹²¹

Television shows became topics of discussion at work while television news and reporting programs led viewers to think about the same issues. Commentator Layne

¹²⁰ Fuguitt, "The City and the Countryside," *Rural Sociology* 28 (1963), 249.

¹²¹ David Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 248-9.

Beaty noted “It’s getting harder to tell the difference between a farm-dweller and a town-dweller.”¹²²

Thus, by the early 1960s farming experienced a radical transformation. Mechanical and chemical innovations changed the way farm families produced on the farm. The tractor and its assorted equipment allowed farmers to increase their productivity, shorten the amount of time at work, but most importantly for them, greatly reduce the back-breaking labor that for centuries had defined farming.¹²³ In 1939, American farmers operated 1.5 million tractors, by 1955 farmers used over 4.5 million.¹²⁴ The use of hybrid seeds, fertilizers, and chemical applications of pesticides and herbicides similarly increased the total production of farmers while reducing the amount of labor needed. The postwar years of 1945 to 1960 experienced the largest and longest sustained growth in farm labor efficiency with an annual increase in efficiency during those years above 5 percent.¹²⁵ With hybrid seeds and fertilizers implemented after World War II, farmers, in a matter of 20 years, doubled the productivity of corn.¹²⁶

As with the adoption of mechanical innovations, farm adoption of advances in genetics and chemicals were often based on the post-war belief in technology and business practices that sought to rationalize production methods. Moreover, farmers

¹²² Layne Beaty, “Radio and Television,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: GPO, 1960), 89.

¹²³ Harold E. Pinches, “Revolution in Agriculture,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (USGPO, 1960), 1. Pinches celebrates the power of newly adopted technology to end the back-breaking work of farming: “The majority of all men who have every lived have been bound to drudgery on the land. We are breaking away from that servitude.” (1).

¹²⁴ James N. Wallace, “Rural Revolution,” *Wall Street Journal* (March 8, 1955).

¹²⁵ Reuben W. Hect and Eugene G. McKibben, “Efficiency of Labor,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: GPO, 1960), 327.

¹²⁶ Wallace, “Rural Revolution,” *Wall Street Journal* (March 8, 1955).

sought technologies and techniques that would help them achieve some stability in an occupation heavily dependent on the instability of nature. Since World War II, the adoption of electricity, the improvement of rural roads and schools and the integration of farm families into mass culture through television all revolutionized the way in which farm people lived their lives. Decisions to join the local Rural Electrification Coop or to purchase a new electric stove were based not just on the human desire to improve living conditions. On top of that very intuitive force, millions of farm families sought improved living standards to enjoy what millions of urban Americans had enjoyed for years.

As beneficial as many of these advances were to millions of farm families in lifting them out of poverty and terrible living conditions, the revolution of post-World War II agriculture introduced new problems and concerns, not just for farmers, but concerns large enough to demand the attention of millions of non-farmers as well. While farm productivity experienced rapid improvements, more rapid than during any other period in American history, the result and the way in which this occurred posed serious problems.¹²⁷ The influential agricultural economist Willard Cochrane noted the development of policy conflict resulting from the rapid and massive farm technological change. “It has become unmistakably clear that the greatly accelerated rates of farm and nonfarm technological advance since the close of World War II have generated more serious conflict than ever before.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Farm productivity in the nine years between 1948 and 1957 rose over 48% while the productivity of non-agricultural workers rose only 25.5%. Stanley Andrews, *The Farmers' Dilemma* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1961), 48. Roger Cobb and Charles Elder, *Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 84; and John M. Brewster, “Society Values and Goals in Respect to Agriculture,” *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 114.

¹²⁸ Willard Cochrane, “Beliefs and Values Underlying Agricultural Policies and Programs,” in *Farm Goals in Conflict: Family Farm, Income, Freedom, Security* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1963), 56.

For farmers on an individual level, new technology geared toward improving the efficiency and productive capacity of land or labor proved quite useful in helping them not only survive, but to increase production to allow families a standard of living unavailable until then. On the macro level, this rapid advance in productivity created tremendous surpluses in commodities.¹²⁹ As surpluses rose, commodity prices fell, continuously squeezing out the least efficient farmers. The result was the largest rural to urban migration in U.S. history. In 1940, the farm population represented 23% of the nation's total; by 1962 farm people represented just 7.7%.¹³⁰ This migration had not only important impacts on rural and urban societies, but it reignited urban concern for the condition of farm families and the structure of agriculture.

The newly adopted technologies and techniques, moreover, considerably increased corporate involvement in every type of agriculture: from beef, hog, milk and chicken production to corn, soybean, cotton, rice, and wheat farming. The growing presence of corporations in farming in the post-World War II period became marked by growing public concern for the viability of family farms, a concept developed in light of the growth and influence of corporate-based farms.¹³¹ Irreversibly, the post-World War II farm revolution altered not just the business of farming, but also politics as well as the place farming had in American culture. What was once considered a sacrosanct institution, the farm was altered by the post-war agricultural revolution to the point that it

¹²⁹ Frederick V. Waugh, "Benefits for All," in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: GPO, 1960), 463 and 464.

¹³⁰ *U.S. Agricultural Policy in the Postwar Years, 1945-1963: Development of U.S. Farm Problems: a 19-Year Legislative Review* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Service, 1963), 3.

¹³¹ "Concentration on the Farm," *New York Times* (Feb. 17, 1947); and C.E. Bishop and K.L. Bachman, "Structure of Agriculture," in *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: 1961), 243.

“[resembled] a manufacturing plant.”¹³² Standing at the center of all of these ramifications, farm people experienced changes in their very identities, as we will discuss in chapter 2.

¹³² Earl L. Butz, “Agribusiness in the Machine Age,” in *The Yearbook of Agriculture: Power to Produce* (Washington: GPO, 1960), 382.

Migration, School Consolidation, Rural Social Change and the Cost-Price Squeeze: Confronting the Problems of the Post-war Technology Revolution

“Never before has the typical farm family enjoyed so many of the creature comforts of modern life. Why, then, are Americans leaving the farm in such numbers?”¹

In a 1952 article in the *New York Times*, journalist Richard Neuberger encapsulated in two sentences the cognitive dissonance Americans experienced when studying farming in America in the post-war period. On the one hand it seemed farm living conditions had improved considerably and looked to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Yet, just as farm life seemed to get better, farm people left the farm for urban living and urban jobs at rates never seen before in American history. This discontinuity perplexed political leaders as well as the millions of urban Americans observing the farm revolution from a distance. Unquestionably farm people experienced benefits from newly available technology. However, the farm revolution did not solely yield benefits. Unintended problems arose due to rapid adoption of tractors, electricity, better roads and other changes covered in the previous chapter. Moreover, farm people did not always take up new machines with unquestioning enthusiasm. Many became aware of the social consequences of rapid technological adoption and sought to limit social change brought on by the switch to machine production as well as the increased

¹ Richard Neuberger, “From the Sod to the Sidewalk,” *New York Times* (July 6, 1952).

mobility and inclusion into mass culture afforded by better roads and improved communications.

Adding to the transition, farmers also responded to the post-World War II agricultural revolution by developing new identities. Confronted by the economic reality of industrial agriculture, farm people turned to the ideals and identities of business. Concepts of efficiency, economies of scale and rational business processes increasingly became the new mantra for millions of farm people seeking to survive in an increasingly competitive agriculture defined by the cost-price squeeze. Yet, many farmers developed another identity, that of family farmers, as a way to find stability in a rapidly changing world as well as to create a sense of continuity with the past. Moreover, this family farm concept helped farmers and non-farmers alike confront the rapid change in post-war agriculture as well as to deal with the general instability of the post-war world. The family farm became a means of addressing tensions and fears brought on by the Cold War. The concept provided a way for all Americans to at least feel a sense of security and to claim moral superiority in the global struggle with communism.

Finally, as all Americans adjusted to the new realities of the agricultural economy they sought government policies to address newly created difficulties defined by the term, “the farm problem” while at the same time maintaining the benefits experienced from new technologies and production patterns. This became a problematic balancing act for political leaders in the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations. Understanding the values and goals that guided farm policy in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the way in which Americans viewed the farm problem help explain the narrow approach taken in

farm policy as well as the failure of political leaders to effectively resolve problems experienced by millions of farm people throughout this time.

Post-war rural-to-urban migration constituted a considerable problem for farm policy leaders. One of the defining characteristics of the post-war agricultural revolution, the massive rural-to-urban migration that occurred from 1940 through the 1960s reshaped rural society in almost every respect. Numbers can give some idea of the size and magnitude of this migration. In 1940, the rural population totaled 30.5 million people representing 23.2 percent of the national population. By 1970, farm population plummeted to 9.7 million people representing less than 6 percent of the population.² In the span of 30 years farm population fell a staggering 60 percent. Clearly there was something going on to induce so many people to make the same life-altering decision. Even more astounding for historians today and baffling for social observers then was that the migration did not seem to make sense. Why did so many people leave farming just as farm people gained so many of the modern conveniences they had long desired? This migration despite rapid improvement in living standards frustrated farm boosters and perplexed social scientists all the more. The very developments intended to keep people down on the farm and interested in farming as an occupation either utterly failed at both goals or even worked against them. This dilemma drove public discussion and social scientific research throughout the post-war period.

Viewing the rural-to-urban migration from their scholarly perspectives rather than from that of farm migrants, many social scientists concluded that some larger undeniable, yet unobservable force pressed farm people to move against their will and against the

² R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 120; and David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 245.

well-being of the nation. After all, for most people, including many scholars, the agrarian myth mattered. One social scientist concluded,

The size and speed of the farm population decline since World War II has been neither voluntary nor desirable. It has contributed neither to the well-being of the farm population nor to the well-being of others.³

However, farm migrants held a considerably different perspective. More concerned with their own standard of living and occupational outlook than with the macro consequences of population shifts, those who left farming for nonfarm living found compelling justification. Despite the rapid improvements in farm living since World War II, the standard of living of rural America continued to lag behind the standard of living of urban areas. Furthermore, farm people could not ignore the income disparities between farm and nonfarm occupations that determined people's standards of living.⁴ As late as 1959, average farm income stood at a meager 43 percent of the average income for nonfarm people. Moreover, as nonfarm purchasing power rose around 19 percent through the 1950s, farm purchasing power actually fell two percent over that same period.⁵ These facts became evident in the justifications farm people provided for making the move to the city. Alvin Will, a farmer from Hustisford, Wisconsin noted,

I got two boys, but they've gone to town and I can't blame them. With the wages they get in town, they'd be foolish to be farming. One of them's a carpenter. He gets \$3.73 an hour, 8 hours a day, five days a week. On the farm, you work 12, 13 hours a day, seven days a week, and you don't get anything like that. No sir,

³ Leon H. Keyserling, *Agriculture and the Public Interest: Toward a New Farm Program Based Upon Abundance* (Washington D.C.: Conference on Economic Progress, 1965), 15.

⁴ C.E. Bishop and K.L. Bachman, "Structure of Agriculture," in *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 242.

⁵ Olaf Larson and Everett M. Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition: The American Setting," in *Our Changing Rural Society: Perspectives and Trends*, ed. James Copp (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1964), 48; and Lauren Soth, "Iowa, or What's Happening to Farming," *New York Times* (Dec. 2, 1962).

you've really got to love farming to stick with it when you look what you got in town.⁶

Not only did farm income lag, but so too, did farm employment opportunities.

The increasing use of machines led to declining demand for farm workers. Also, as farm size increased to make the most efficient use of machinery, farm numbers declined.

Throughout the second half of the 1950s the number of farms in the U.S. declined by an average of 89,000 each year.⁷ All of this translated into fewer opportunities for younger people to continue in agriculture. The trends forcing a reduction in farm-related job opportunities became so pervasive that the National Planning Association concluded only 1 out of 10 farm children would be able to make an adequate living in farming when they became adults.⁸ The simple solution for many farm people, in light of such overwhelming conditions, was to move to areas with more job opportunities.

Not only did potential income and job opportunities play a role in farm people's decisions to migrate, so too, did the difference in cultural life found between rural and urban areas.⁹ Similar to the improvement in rural standard of living experienced in the post-war period, commodified social and cultural opportunities increased for rural residents. But as with farm income, the improvements in social and cultural opportunities found in rural areas still lagged in comparison to those of urban America. Young people became enamored with urban living and the interaction with so many different people as well as the opportunities to enjoy a wide array of entertainment

⁶ "Why Farmers are Troubled—a Farm Town's Answers," *U.S. News and World Report* (May 9, 1960).

⁷ "Farm Decline Drastic, Planning Group Says," *The Washington Post* (Sep. 5, 1960).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 266.

venues.¹⁰ In the end, the decision for most migrants was not simply one of choice, but it also was not one solely of necessity either. In 1959, Stanley Sladjiski, a farmer in Mattituck, New York decided to leave farming for a job in insurance after new production techniques in potato farming narrowed profit margins and made survival more difficult. Sladjiski had two options—expand his potato farm or sell it.¹¹ While not necessarily great options, Sladjiski, like many others, nonetheless had options. This stands in stark contrast to the picture painted by social scientists and political observers of the time who often portrayed the rural-to-urban migration as a forced move, one in which migrants had no other option or agency.

The in-migration of tens of millions of farm people to towns and urban centers required an adjustment period for both the migrants and the areas to which they migrated. For the farm folk turned urban residents the new environment was unnerving, mostly because they were not prepared for work and life in a non-farm setting. While rural education systems had made considerable advances in the post-war period, the migrants forced to find work in urban settings had received their educations in the older pre-World War II system that typically offered a lower level of education. These migrants faced difficulty when trying to find work.¹² Many drifted toward lower-wage manual labor occupations. Moreover, many viewed themselves as socially below established residents and were more likely to identify with the working or lower class than with the middle

¹⁰ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 246; and Richard Neuberger, "From the Sod to the Sidewalk," *New York Times* (July 6, 1952).

¹¹ Byron Porterfield, "Small L.I. Farms are Selling Out," *New York Times* (Feb. 22, 1960).

¹² Ronald Freedman and Deborah Freedman, "Farm-Reared Elements in the Nonfarm Population," *Rural Sociology* 21 (1956), 54.

class.¹³ Job opportunities were particularly narrow for African Americans who faced discrimination in urban areas of both the North and South.

The growing cohort of farm migrants, as much as 25 percent of all urban population growth in the 1950s resulted from rural migration, put stress on city infrastructure and social services.¹⁴ With considerably more people crowded into cities, transportation networks became more congested. Moreover, with more people competing for jobs than available, unemployment rose. Many politicians, both rural and urban, noted that the number of unemployed in cities closely approximated the number of people who left farming.¹⁵ Urban politicians became concerned over the rising costs of supporting the unemployed. Politicians representing rural areas focused on this issue as a way of drawing attention to difficulties experienced in farming that led many farm people to quit farming.¹⁶

Many farm migrants, particularly white farm people, moved only a short distance to a nearby town or regional center of business. This group had less difficulty making the adjustment because often times they were able to maintain friendship and kinship networks established in the farming community. African American migrants from the South, however, often traveled to the North in search of opportunities. Difficulties from such a considerable migration were balanced somewhat by kinship networks often

¹³ Ibid, 55.

¹⁴ Larson and Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition," *Our Changing Rural Society*, 52.

¹⁵ William F. Groves, "Farm Price Squeeze Feeds Unemployment," *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* (May 17, 1958); and R.L. McNamara, "Impact of Rural Migration on the City," in *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences, and Alternatives*, ed. Richard Rodefeld (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 89.

¹⁶ Keyserling, *Agriculture and the Public Interest*, 15.

already established in northern urban centers during earlier periods of African American migration.

Those who migrated longer distances or to larger urban and metropolitan areas without the benefit of established kinship networks often experienced culture shock.¹⁷ Unaccustomed to living not only in close proximity to other people, but interacting with people from vastly different cultures and backgrounds, farm migrants took years to fully acclimate to urban living. It generally took a few years for farm migrants to adjust their older rural values of a work-centered life, respect for conformity to religion, and strong group conformity to become more in line with dominant urban values of secular rationality, equality, and less adherence to religious doctrine.¹⁸ Moreover, farm migrants had difficulty shedding their distrust of big business, newspapers and labor unions.¹⁹ In the process, they often drew inward, living in social isolation. Slowly these rural migrants became homogenized into urban mass culture through interaction at work, schools and in neighborhoods.

For those who remained in farming, the dramatic changes of the post-war period, evidenced by new technology and massive migration, held mixed blessings. Even if some rural residents managed to maintain their farm or rural residence, the new farm economy and production methods based on new technologies altered farm society not just on the farm, as outlined in chapter one, but the entire rural social structure to the point that farm residents experienced as many changes as those who decided to migrate. Farm

¹⁷ Freedman and Freedman, "Farm-Reared Elements," *Rural Sociology* 21 (1956), 51.

¹⁸ Lyle W. Shannon, "Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy and Acceptable Rates of Change," in *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 272.

¹⁹ Olaf Larson, "Values and Beliefs of Rural People," *Rural USA Persistence and Change*, ed. Thomas Ford (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1978), 93, 104, 105.

people may have experienced improved living conditions as a result of the newly available and recently adopted technologies such as electricity, tractors and other production tools. However, these very tools that made work less labor and time intensive also reduced rural social interaction in work situations. Before the advent of tractors and combines, harvesting crops such as wheat involved the entire farm community working together in a cooperative effort.²⁰ Farm people would travel among farms to lessen the physical burden of harvesting, speed up the process to improve participants' crop yield and avoid foul weather while providing social interaction which made the work more enjoyable. These harvesting or threshing rings provided an opportunity to socialize not just for men, but for women as well as they worked together to prepare large meals. Children learned from observation as well as participation in these threshing rings social mores in how to interact with neighbors.

Tractors and harvesting equipment such as combines quickly dissolved threshing rings after World War II. As noted in chapter one, farmers appreciated new mechanical equipment for greatly reducing the burden of physical labor, speeding up the harvesting process which helped them avoid costly delays brought on by foul weather, ending the burdensome task for farm women of preparing massive meals within threshing and harvesting rings, while also allowing them to farm more acreage which brought in more

²⁰ For further treatment of pre-World War II farm production methods and social interaction see Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Allan Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the 19th Century* (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1963); LuAnn Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Jamie Marie Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and J. Sanford Rikoon, *Threshing in the Midwest, 1820-1940: A Study of Traditional Culture and Technological Change* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

income and thus allowed an improved standard of living. Despite all of these benefits, some farmers balked at transitioning to machine-based agriculture. Many noted the importance of maintaining the social interaction afforded by cooperative fieldwork and recognized that machines, despite all of their benefits, also led to decreased social interaction with neighbors. With tractors, farmers could complete their own fieldwork without the aid of neighbors.²¹ The rapid adoption of labor saving devices both before and after World War II shows that farm people accepted and sometimes sought the sacrifice of social ties in favor of less work and more independence. Even though the new developments in agriculture created more time for farm people to pursue social interaction in a leisure setting, in the end they actually reduced social interaction among farm residents by reducing work-related interaction.

Another difficult tension developing in light of the adoption of agricultural technology advancements involved the continuation of rural poverty. Farm people who adopted tractors, hybrid seeds and chemical additives often chose to do so as a means of raising their income. Frequently, however, the adoption of such tools, while providing more income, also raised the costs of farming. Moreover, as farmers increasingly turned to new production methods, total crop output rose dramatically, thereby depressing the market value of crops. This process became known as the cost-price squeeze with farmers' costs rising faster than the price of the commodities they sold. Farm people may have enjoyed an improved standard of living in the post-war period, but they often struggled just as before in order to survive. Most farmers remained on the edge of bankruptcy, although in the post-war period they lived more comfortably doing so.

²¹ Richard Collins, interview by author, 25 March 2005, Clark, Missouri, tape recording, WHMC, Columbia, Missouri.

When viewed in relation to non-farm income, farm income levels remained woefully inadequate. In 1947, per capita farm income from farm sources totaled \$778 per year, \$1020 per year from all sources. These amounts trailed far behind per capita non-farm income at \$1992 per year. Even after most farmers had transitioned to machine-based agriculture farm income failed to keep up to non-farm income. In 1964, per capita income from farm sources totaled \$966 per year. Even considering the added income from off-farm sources, the per capita farm income of \$1494 paled in comparison to per capita non-farm income of \$2595.²² This sense of relative poverty added further stress to farm people's lives and a sense that America's farm people continued to experience problems despite adopting new technology that had promised to improve their situation.

Compounding the continuing problems of relative poverty and out migration, rural people experienced a difficult adjustment to the social aspects of mechanized agriculture. Under the capital intensive system, farmers not only experienced increased independence and isolation, as noted earlier, but they now faced tensions brought on by a growing divergence of size and condition of individual farms. As all farms experienced mechanization and the removal of labor limitations, some farms grew quite large. In fact, the five year period between 1954 and 1959 saw the largest increase in average acreage per farm, rising from 242 acres to 302. However, growth in average acreage actually hides the fact that farms grew increasingly divergent in size during this period. In fact, during the 1950s, as popular concern grew for all farmers facing tougher situations, concern became focused particularly on the portion of farms that had not expanded in

²² Keyserling, *Agriculture and the Public Interest*, 8.

size and were deemed “inadequate.”²³ Before this agricultural revolution, most farms were limited in size to the amount of labor a family could provide. Under this labor-intensive system of production, few farms could grow beyond the normal or typical size. But with machines, farming became more capital-intensive. Under this system available capital often determined farm size, allowing some farms to grow considerably in size while others stagnated.

Farms with available capital grew in size while farms without readily available capital disappeared, stayed the same size, or became part-time farms requiring farm families to supplement farm income with off-farm income. The diverging condition of farms led to frustration and sometime envy in those that did not experience growth. Some farmers lacking the capital to expand their farms sometimes developed jealousy for neighbors who expanded but had just a few years earlier lived in poverty. As Missouri farmer Richard Collins noted about community before the agricultural revolution, “Everybody is pretty well in the same boat, even though some of them went broke and some of them didn’t.”²⁴ However, with farm people in the post-war era now seeking a consumer lifestyle, one that required more money to achieve, tensions between wealthy and poor farmers grew to levels that had not existed just a few years earlier. Many farmers who had expanded their farms either experienced or perceived community resentment and sometimes opted not to expand acreage, buy the larger tractor, or double herd size in order to avoid community strain brought on by such expansion.²⁵

²³ Leonard Hasting Schoff, *A National Agricultural Policy: For All the People of the United States* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 27; and Earl O. Heady et. al, *Roots of the Farm Problem: Changing Technology, Changing Capital Use, Changing Labor Needs* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1965), 28.

²⁴ Richard Collins, interview by author, 25 March 2005, Clark, Missouri, tape recording, WHMC, Columbia, Missouri; and Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 247.

²⁵ Norman F. Keiser, “The American Farm Problem and Public Policy,” *Social Science* 32 (Jan. 1957), 301.

Tensions within rural communities grew in the post-war period also as a result of the adoption of new technologies. The growing independence of farm people as well as the out migration of a large portion of the farm population changed the basis of social interaction. As millions of rural residents made the move to urban areas, rural institutions such as community centers, social organizations such as women's clubs and 4-H, and particularly the small rural church, experienced membership loss.²⁶ In 1961, the Missouri Agriculture Experiment Station conducted a survey of rural churches and found that many had lost so much membership and funding that they could sustain only one Sunday service per month. Churches throughout rural America were forced to either close or consolidate with neighboring churches. The Missouri Agriculture Experiment Station concluded that the trend would only continue, even though small rural churches had better attendance rates per 100 members than larger urban churches.²⁷

Compounding the problem, the increasing mobility of rural residents as a result of better roads led to more options for social interaction and participation.²⁸ Moreover, farm families became less tied to local rural social institutions as their interaction with neighboring families in work situations declined. The loss of interdependence among farm families allowed them to cut ties with neighbors. As Richard Collins noted, "So you don't need to be quite as nice to your neighbor if you don't think you are going to

²⁶ Stanley Andrews, *The Farmers' Dilemma* (Washington: D.C., Public Affairs Press, 1961), 3; and Richard G. Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age: The Loup Country of Nebraska, 1910-1970* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 176.

²⁷ "Rural Churches Have Problems," *Missouri Farmer* (Jan. 1962).

²⁸ David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979), 134.

need him for something.”²⁹ Driven by increasing interest in consumption-based activities, farm families replaced local social institutions such as the church, women’s clubs, and 4-H with increased consumption of market-based consumer goods such as movies, sporting events and the activity of shopping itself.

Compounding all of these changes brought on by the agricultural revolution, rural population loss also led to a declining tax base for rural communities.³⁰ The 1950s saw an 18 percent rise in the national population, yet half of the nation’s 3,131 counties experienced population loss.³¹ This problem strained rural communities all the more as rural poverty rates climbed well above those of urban areas in the 1960s.³² Community leaders could either raise tax rates on residents, which would only make their tight economic situations more difficult, consolidate services with surrounding communities and counties, or cut funding for services such as local welfare aid and primary and secondary education. Typical of the effort to deal with the shrinking tax base, many rural communities tried consolidation. In an attempt to cut costs, six Missouri counties consolidated their county offices including clerk, assessor, treasurer, collector, circuit clerk and recorder of deeds.³³ With any of these solutions rural communities stood to lose in quality of services provided by local governments, thus only driving more residents

²⁹ Richard Collins, interview by author, 25 March 2005, Clark, Missouri, tape recording, WHMC, Columbia, Missouri.

³⁰ Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age*, 174; and Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 247.

³¹ Burt Schorr, “Troubled Counties: Declining Population Trims Tax Revenues in Many Rural Areas,” *Wall Street Journal* (June 17, 1963).

³² Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 247.

³³ Schorr, “Troubled Counties,” *Wall Street Journal* (June 17, 1963).

toward urban areas that could provide more services at lower tax rates because of a larger tax base.

Urban areas, although not the source of the difficulties faced by farm people in the post-war era, nonetheless received a considerable amount of scorn and contempt from farm people. It wasn't that urban residents sought to disrupt or antagonize rural people in any way. Nonetheless, as farm people experienced increasing economic difficulty, the growing wealth, consumer orientation, and general success of urban centers appeared all the more out of step with rural living. Moreover, rural people could not help but assume a connection between their own increasingly difficult situations and the comfortable situations of urbanites. They could not help but note that while farm people had struggled to produce more food, the urban consumer enjoyed the benefits through lower retail food prices.³⁴

The forces behind the migration of millions of farm people to urban areas, while seemingly benign, caused a number of deep-seated antagonisms with those who remained on the farm. Urban areas, while offering a destination of opportunity for rural youth uninterested or unable to enter farming, appeared quite differently to older rural residents. To them, the migration of farm people, particularly of younger people, occurred not for their opportunity, but as a theft of rural America's future generations.³⁵ Compounding this attitude was the fact that throughout the post-war period migrants consisted of rural young people between the ages of 18 and 29, continuing the historical trend, and in the

³⁴ "What City People Should Know About Farmers," *Capper's Farmer* (Dec. 1958). This article concluded, "In the 1952-57 period farmers actually subsidized consumers!" found in File 1165, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC; and Dale Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture: Public Policy in a Democratic Society* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), 58.

³⁵ Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age*, 176.

process leaving older people remaining on the farms.³⁶ This older farm population held more conservative views while also having different life experiences compared to younger generations, guiding them to view change with more suspicion. As rural youth left, these older people not only felt more isolated and depressed, ironically as transportation and communication methods improved, but came to blame urban America for spreading its consumer values to the rural youth.³⁷

And for many of the older farm generations, urban America represented a far-off land full of sinister and evil forces. Richard Collins recalled early childhood memories from the 1930s of his parents teaching him the city was no place to live. “The city was an evil place to farmers, it’s all it was.”³⁸ Farm people often believed urban politicians to be unflinchingly corrupt, industrial workers to be over-paid and lazy, and the entire city population to be susceptible to radicalism and atheistic beliefs.³⁹ Not only were farm people prejudiced against urban areas, the small amount of information they received about city life often further inclined them to maintain their negative presuppositions of urban America. Typically, rural people who visited cities could not help but notice all that was different from rural living; concentrated living and working conditions, social isolation, poverty, homelessness, immorality and violence. Newspapers would publish stories that only fueled these ideas held by farm people. A resident of Eolia, Missouri, a

³⁶ Edmund S. Brunner and Wilbur C. Hallenbeck, *American Society: Urban and Rural Patterns* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 196; and Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age*, 155.

³⁷ David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 247.

³⁸ Richard Collins, interview by author, 25 March 2005, Clark, Missouri, tape recording, WHMC, Columbia, Missouri.

³⁹ Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 104.

small farming community located northwest of St. Louis, wrote an anonymous letter to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, chastising the newspaper while deriding the city of St. Louis for its crime. “Then wonder why a crime wave when you Dam [sic] new papers [sic] feature the very thing that makes crime.”⁴⁰ This irate letter writer continued to lambaste the newspaper and the city not only for their lack of morals, but for tempting rural youth to the city by celebrating such immoral behavior. The letter also contains a sense of anger over the rural migration and the way urbanites viewed those who remained in agriculture when, according to urban people, better and more rewarding occupations awaited in cities.

I guess all the smart rural people went to St. Louis and only the Dumb-Bells are left on the farms. What St. Louis needs is a Kanasas [sic] City Star. A lot of people read those lieing Adv. [sic (lying ads)] you have, picture Leisure [sic], Strength Beautiful Homes [sic] inducing the kids to drink certain brands of Whiskey. Well you did an excellent job by pictuering [sic] the satisfaction of women smoking cigarettes so some tobacco MFG. [manufacturer] could make a few dollars.⁴¹

Responding to what many farm people perceived as an increasing influence of urban consumerism in rural America some farm people sought to isolate themselves from urban areas. Furthermore, farm people attempted to maintain local control of political and education systems in the face of increasing pressure to consolidate such public entities with nearby urban centers. While improved roads helped farmers get products to markets, improving farm income, such roads also facilitated the export of rural people to urban areas through migration. Moreover, for those who remained in agriculture, better roads allowed increased interaction with urban areas, aiding the spread of urban influence into the hinterlands, pushing some farm people to feel all the more a sense of attack from

⁴⁰ Letter to the Editor, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (April 25, 1949).

⁴¹ Ibid.

outside the community. Throughout the 20th century, farm people periodically objected to road improvements often for the sake of maintaining social isolation.⁴² Moreover, farming communities organized development councils as a means of retaining a rural population by bringing the jobs to them. In 1962, Grundy and Mercer Counties, located in north-central Missouri, formed the Green Hills Area Development Council. It sought to improve area “job opportunities, conveniences, modern schools and leisure activities.”⁴³ Elmer McClure, Master of the Oregon State Grange noted, “We realize that comforts and convenience are essential if the farm is to succeed in competition with the obvious lure of the city.”⁴⁴ The Oregon State Grange, like other Granges since the 19th century, had sponsored social events as a way to keep the next generation interested in staying in agriculture. In the post-World War II period, the Montana Farmers Union went even further by encouraging local chapters to start “amateur theatricals, potluck suppers, modern dance groups for farm girls, and bookmobiles to take the latest best-sellers from farm to farm.”⁴⁵

Beyond these community efforts, farm leaders discussed ways in which farm people individually could slow the rural-to-urban migration. J.F. Johnson, general manager of the MFA Milling Company in Springfield, Missouri, organized meetings between county agents, cooperative managers, and rural bankers to determine solutions. Typical of the solutions presented by other farm leaders, Johnson and others concluded that diversification would spread risks among a number of commodity markets, thus

⁴² Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age*, 176.

⁴³ “They’re Doing Something About Their Problems,” *Missouri Farmer* (May 1962).

⁴⁴ Richard Neuberger, “From the Sod to the Sidewalk,” *New York Times* (July 6, 1952).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

stabilizing farm income and reducing the incidence of debt periods that often led to rural-to-urban migration. They further suggested, like other groups, that farm families should pursue more labor-saving technology not just to make farming more attractive to the next generation, but to improve efficiency, thereby making individual farms more competitive.⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, and a sign of the complex situation farm people faced, the very solution of more labor-saving technology proposed by Johnson would eventually increase the cost-price squeeze and make farming more competitive.

School consolidation proved a particularly sensitive issue for farming communities. As noted in chapter one, improvement of rural educational systems became a necessity to adequately prepare rural children for a future in either urban occupations or in the rapidly evolving farming sector. The combination of a lack of funds to provide comprehensive and effective education at rural one-room schools and the development of the new option of consolidating schools made possible by improved rural roads pushed many rural communities away from small, independent local schools and toward larger, consolidated school districts. Based on these factors, school consolidation, while beginning at the turn of the century, occurred at record pace during the post-war period. In 1948, there were 100,946 school districts in the United States. In just ten years, by 1958 that number fell by over half to 48,043 school districts.⁴⁷ In that

⁴⁶ “Discuss Ways to Slow Off-the-Farm Movement,” *Missouri Farmer* (Nov. 1957).

⁴⁷ S.J. Knezevich, “The Changing Structure of Public Education in Iowa and Its Relation to the Educational Needs of Rural and Urban Areas,” in *Urban Responses to Agricultural Change*, ed. Clyde Kohn (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 178.

period, Illinois went from 11,061 school districts to 1,770, a reduction of over 80 percent of school districts in the state through the process of consolidation.⁴⁸

Yet, as often as farm communities turned to consolidation as a means of survival, residents nonetheless held mixed feelings toward this dramatic change and, in many instances, fought against this process.⁴⁹ Across America, rural communities felt the pressure to consolidate schools to provide better and more cost effective education to their youth. Some communities happily acquiesced. Others grudgingly gave in, holding onto resentment for years after the consolidation occurred.⁵⁰ The village of Killmer, Illinois fought for years to stave off consolidation. Even after consolidation, Killmer residents fought to secede from the consolidated school district.⁵¹

Any combination of factors could lead farm communities to take particular stances on school consolidation. Deep cultural undercurrents within each community that defined identity played a major role in determining response to consolidation. For many, the local school provided either the only or the last official institution that represented the independent identity of the community. Another factor included each community's relationship with their neighboring communities. Sometimes religious tensions between communities were drawn into the school consolidation battle as the local school became one of the last means by which communities could teach youth their own religious

⁴⁸ Dennis Nordin and Roy V. Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: the Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 153.

⁴⁹ David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution*, 79. Danbom provides excellent coverage of the battle over school consolidation while the process was in its infancy.

⁵⁰ For more on opposition to consolidation see: David R. Reynolds, *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999) and Alan Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union: School Consolidation and Community Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁵¹ Alan Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union*, 1.

values.⁵² Lobbying for a very restricted level of consolidation in order to maintain local religious control of schools, the Missouri Religious Council declared, “There can be no Rural Religious education without Rural Education.”⁵³ And still another factor included a sense of attack from outside forces.⁵⁴ Some communities concluded consolidation as a friendly alliance with similar communities while others felt it a means by which distant cities, both geographically and culturally, sought to impose their own values upon rural students and effectively kill the individual identity of these communities.

Urban observers could not understand the hesitance farm communities had for consolidation and concluded derisively that “false neighborhood pride” stood in the way of better education by leading rural communities to reject consolidation.⁵⁵ Urban Americans failed to see why rural residents would insist upon keeping old schools that lacked indoor plumbing and potentially hindered the education of children when they could enjoy the benefits of new school buildings that possessed modern amenities including a gymnasium for extra-curricular events and a kitchen where cooks would prepare hot lunches.⁵⁶ Yet, this “false pride,” as urban Americans called it, often arose not out of some antagonistic attitude, but out of genuine concern regarding the rapid social changes experienced throughout the 20th century and especially in the post-war period. In the midst of experiencing an albeit friendly school consolidation that had

⁵² “Rural School Types,” *New York Times* (Aug. 17, 1952). The article noted a University of Wisconsin study that found many rural homogeneous cultural and religious groups clung to their local school to maintain customs.

⁵³ Missouri Religious Council to Missouri educators and legislators, February 26, 1947, File 698, Marion T. Bennett, Papers, WHMC.

⁵⁴ Lauren Soth, “Iowa, or What’s Happening to Farming,” *New York Times* (Dec. 2, 1962).

⁵⁵ Hugh A. Fogarty, “Midwest States,” *New York Times* (July 14, 1946) and Benjamin Fine, “Education in Review,” *New York Times* (Dec. 30, 1951).

⁵⁶ Hugh Fogarty, “Midwest States,” *New York Times* (July 14, 1946).

become inevitable due to population decline, Clarice Rhoads, a resident of Green Castle, Missouri eloquently summed up residents' attitude toward the loss of the last elementary school class in 1960 to the consolidated school in nearby Green City.

Time and progress move on and changes are inevitable, but we regret the loss of our local school. The bonds between the generations have stretched a bit further and the town feels the shadows lengthen without the sound of that old school bell.⁵⁷

Despite these efforts, rural migration continued unabated as did the growth in cultural influence of urban America in rural hinterlands. These changes became part and parcel to the continued industrialization and specialization in agriculture in the post-war period. As much as farm communities sought to address the consequences of cultural homogenization, population out-migration, and loss of local authority brought on by changes in agricultural production, they nonetheless continued to mechanize. Indicative of the trend toward the new system of agriculture, specialization in farming grew faster between 1954 and 1959 than during any previous ten year period.⁵⁸

Farm people held complex attitudes toward the changes occurring in agriculture during this period. On the one hand, farm mechanization and adoption of other advances offered the first real opportunity to improve standard of living. Yet, the consequences of industrialization included significant population loss, a declining sense of community and interaction among farm neighbors and a real or perceived threat of encroachment of urban America. With a range of responses and activities, farm communities throughout America did their best to mediate the positives and negatives associated with such rapid technological and social change.

⁵⁷ Clarice Rhoads, "No More School," *Missouri Farmer* (April 1960).

⁵⁸ Larson and Rogers, "Rural Society in Transition," *Our Changing Rural Society*, 52.

One would reasonably ask, if the consequences of technological change appeared so difficult and radical, why would farm families continue to pursue a technology-driven agriculture? Social scientists of the period would answer simply, farm people had no choice or lacked knowledge of other options.⁵⁹ Either they adopted the new technology or they fell behind in land and labor efficiency which led to uncompetitiveness and eventual farm foreclosure. This view often portrayed farm people as simply receivers of new technology, unable to affect any power in the process and often reflected an urban bias and assumption that farm people lacked agency and sometimes even rational thought. More recent agricultural historians, however, have highlighted the agency farm people had in the technological revolution, ably using some technologies to their benefit while disregarding others.⁶⁰ This view highlights the decision-making process of farm people in debating whether or not to adopt a particular technology.

These views take opposing perspectives on this question. A better answer, however, lies somewhere in-between. It is true that many farm families had agency in selecting, rejecting or modifying particular innovations as they became available.⁶¹ For the families that delayed adoption, other concerns such as maintenance of community or traditional work patterns held more importance. But for families that pursued new technologies in search of profit, and the fact that farm efficiency and productivity

⁵⁹ Farm Foundation, *Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies* (Ames: The Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment, 1959).

⁶⁰ Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 194. In studying an earlier period, Barron argues rural people did not simply receive outside ideas and forces, but often buffered such new forces with their own values and needs. See also Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). This work does an excellent job of denoting the power farm people had throughout the agricultural revolution of the 20th century.

⁶¹ An excellent study into farm families' decision to adopt various forms of technology after World War II is J.L. Anderson, "Industrializing the Corn Belt: Iowa Farmers, Technology, and the Midwestern Landscape, 1940-1972," (Ph.D. Diss., Iowa State University, 2005).

eventually played a large role in determining the survivability of a farm, the economic and market realities of the new agricultural system showed that market forces eventually proved more powerful than the agency of any individual farm family.

The concept of a technology treadmill, created by agricultural economist Willard Cochrane in the 1950s, perhaps best illustrates farm family agency within a system that eventually imposed its power upon its participants. In 1958, Cochrane theorized two concepts. First, that the rapid technological advances occurring throughout the post-war period not only made farming less labor-intensive, but also these advances caused declining commodity prices as improved production raised the supply in relation to total demand. Second, and more importantly, this reality of farm technology created a technology treadmill for farmers. As they adopted new technologies such as tractors or herbicides, production rose and the commodity prices fell, often forcing farmers to further adopt new technologies to either stay ahead of the cost-price squeeze, or simply keep up.

Within this framework, Cochrane classified farmers as anywhere between initiators or first adopters down to late adopters and holdouts. The initiators, those who became the first in a community to adopt a new technology, benefited from their early adoption in that they experienced reduced production costs (better cost-efficiency) while the market price was still based primarily on the productivity of older methods. These farmers experienced a period of higher income. As other farmers adopted the new technology, the market supply became correspondingly larger, and hence the market price fell. By the time late adopters chose to make the switch, any benefits experienced by the early adopters had disappeared entirely and, in fact, had reversed. Instead of

staying ahead or maximizing the gains from early adoption, late adopters sought to minimize losses caused by holding onto older production methods.⁶² In their situation, the market price for a commodity was based on the new, more efficient technology, while they still farmed with the less efficient older technology. Within this system, farm people had the agency to choose if, when, and how they would adopt new technologies as they arose. However, the overarching facts became apparent, farm people may have had agency, but market forces often sent such powerful signals that for many farm people the only option they had was to either keep up on the technology treadmill, or get off.

This decision over adoption proved quite difficult for millions of farm people and in fact indicates the growing difficulty farm families faced in the post-war period. Farm families not only adopted various technologies at their own pace as a means of confronting the cost-price squeeze, they also pursued off-farm income as a means of replacing declining farm income. While true that farm income continued to rise throughout this period, the reality of falling commodity prices and rising costs pushed many farm families to find supplementary income from off-farm work. After all, with new labor saving devices adopted on the farm such as tractors, electric milk pumps, and electric grain elevators, farm people had more time available for other activities.

A comparison of inflation-adjusted incomes for two years gives a sense of this trend. In 1947, at the beginning of the post-war agricultural revolution, per capita farm income from farm work stood at \$778. Per capita farm income from off-farm sources for that year stood at \$242. By 1964, per capita income from farm work climbed \$188 to \$966 while per capita farm income from off-farm work rose \$286, or more than doubled,

⁶² Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 96.

to \$528.⁶³ These numbers tell us a couple of things. First, despite rising output, income from farm production did not rise as fast. As noted earlier, this resulted from not only rising costs but the market reaction to increasing supplies of commodities with a corresponding fall in market price. Across the board farm expenses rose over 50 percent throughout the post-war period. The cost of fertilizer rose 90 percent, repairs 67 percent, and livestock 86 percent. Taxes and mortgage interest both more than doubled between 1947 and 1960, climbing 111 percent and 184 percent, respectively.⁶⁴ Labor became the only farm cost to not rise at double-digit rates; however that made little difference as the need for labor fell by 50 percent between 1940 and 1960 with increasing use of new innovations.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the price for a bushel of soybeans fell from \$2.73 to \$1.96 between 1951 and 1960. Corn fell from \$1.66 to \$.87. Beef cattle fell from \$28.70 per hundred pounds to \$19.40 and chicken prices fell almost 50 percent from 30 to 15.8 cents per pound.⁶⁶

Facing declining profit margins, farm families turned toward other sources of income to achieve better standards of living, but also sometimes as a means of supporting the farm through stretches of low farm income. Part and full-time employment off the farm increased considerably for both men and women throughout the post-war period.

⁶³ Leon Keyserling, *Agriculture and the Public Interest* (Washington D.C.: Conference on Economic Progress, 1965), 8; and Bruce Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How it Flourished and What It Cost* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 2002), 271.

⁶⁴ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies and Manpower, *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze*, 87th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1961), 28.

⁶⁵ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies and Manpower, *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze*, 87th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1961), 28; and Earl O. Heady et. al, *Roots of the Farm Problem: Changing Technology, Changing Capital Use, Changing Labor Needs* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1965), 18.

⁶⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies and Manpower, *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze*, 87th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1961), 70.

Such off-farm work helped farm families soften the impact of a decline in commodity prices. Just as important as the income derived from off-farm work, the social and cultural changes impacted rural living so profoundly as to redefine gender roles and the nature of farming itself.

For the millions of farm families seeking to improve their living conditions, but either unable or unwilling to revolutionize their farming methods, off-farm work became a significant way to afford modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing and electricity. Even if a farm family stayed ahead of the technology treadmill and derived the highest income possible from adopting new technology, they often turned to off-farm work. L.E. Schaefer, an Iowa farmer who also worked in a washing machine factory, noted “The standard of living we have we wouldn’t have if we weren’t working off the farms.”⁶⁷ Off-farm income allowed many farm families to narrow the income gap between themselves and their urban counterparts.⁶⁸ In many cases, the income from off-farm sources helped families afford improvements for the farm geared toward production, such as a tractor or combine, and not necessarily for improvements in the farm home. Schaefer explained, “We have good machinery, labor savers... Couldn’t do it if we didn’t have other incomes.”⁶⁹ For many farm families, outside income became the primary source of support while the farm supplied a declining portion of farm income.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ William Blair, “Costs Keeping ‘Em Down on Farms,” *New York Times* (March 6, 1958).

⁶⁸ Edward Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1963), 11-12.

⁶⁹ Blair, “Costs Keeping ‘Em Down on Farms,” *New York Times* (March 6, 1958).

⁷⁰ By the 1990s, a majority of farm families garnered more income from non-farm sources than from the farm. Carolyn Dimitri, Anne Effland, and Neilson Conklin, “The 20th Century Transformation of U.S. Agriculture and Farm Policy,” *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Information Bulletin Number 3* (Washington: GPO, June 2005).

Farm men found work in nearby small towns and urban areas typically in blue collar occupations. For such farmers, entry into factory work and service sectors proved the easiest. These jobs, while paying relatively lower wages compared to other non-farm work, nonetheless provided the main form of off-farm employment for farm men not simply because of convenience, but also because they often lacked the qualifications and education to take up employment in white collar occupations. Further, the mechanical, construction and farm equipment operation and driving skills developed on farms meant that many farm men were often well-qualified for carpentry, engine or automobile repair and truck driving.

Regardless of the type of off-farm work landed by farm men, observers viewed in two ways the trend toward reliance on outside income. One on hand, the increasing reliance on off-farm income acted as a means of keeping young men in the occupation of farming, even if just in a part-time role. Without this off-farm income, millions of farm people would be forced to give up the farm. More importantly, without off-farm work, many more farm people would be forced to leave farming entirely because of a lack of work in agriculture. Without off-farm work available to take up excess farm labor, hundreds of thousands of farm people would be stuck in agriculture dividing up inadequate work and income opportunities.⁷¹ But with this income, part-time farming became a viable option as farm people increasingly supported the farm through other sources of income.⁷²

⁷¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, "Rural-Farm Males Entering and Leaving Working Ages, 1940-50 and 1950-60: Replacement Ratios and Rates," *Economic Information Bulletin No. 22* (August 1956), found in File 24412, Thomas B. Curtis Records, WHMC.

⁷² William Blair, "Costs Keeping 'Em Down on Farms," *New York Times* (March 6, 1958).

Yet, on the other hand, observers worried that the trend toward supplementing farm income with income from off-farm sources somehow destroyed the institution and cultural significance of farming. To this group of observers, the increasing dependence farm families had on off-farm income signified a serious problem in agriculture, particularly for the institution of the family farm. After all, if one defined the family farm as a farm that provided the income to support one family, and if farm people increasingly turned to off-farm work to supplement farm-derived income, then the family farm was failing. As an editorial in *The Ozarks Mountaineer* noted, “If a family farm is one which supports a family, then this type of agriculture is fading from America.”⁷³ Viewed in combination with the rapid off-farm migration of the post-war years, the increasing dependence on non-farm income for those still in farming signaled a dangerous trend.

The employment of farm women in off-farm occupations held significance not only for these reasons, but also for entirely different reasons as well. For farm women, off-farm employment provided more opportunities than were available on the farm through the gendered work roles that became strengthened with the adoption of production technology. With the push toward capital-intensive agriculture, particularly in the areas of eggs, poultry and vegetables, farm women who had produced these commodities for the market found themselves not only undercut at the marketplace by larger producers, but they also found themselves ostracized from such market-oriented commodity production.⁷⁴ With the capitalization of production of these commodities

⁷³ Paul Greer, “Need the Small Farmer Disappear?” *The Ozarks Mountaineer* (1958), found in File 1163, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁷⁴ Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 159. Jellison provides an excellent analysis of the intersection of gender and technology in agriculture in the mid-twentieth century.

professionalization followed. Increasingly throughout the post-war period larger producers used cheaper costs of production, standardization and regulation of commodities to force out home-production, typically controlled by farm women.

Moreover, the advent of electricity on farms either reduced considerably the amount of time spent on food preservation tasks or ended such tasks entirely. Canning, an important task for farm women through the early twentieth century, quickly declined in the post-war era as electricity made on-the-farm refrigeration and freezing convenient and inexpensive. No longer did farm women have to dedicate days of work toward the preservation of garden vegetables and farm meats. Instead, freezing or refrigeration required little preparation.⁷⁵ Coupled with easier transportation to supermarkets through improved roads, falling retail costs of food and increased participation of farm people in the mass culture of consumption, on-farm production of food dramatically declined. To be certain, some women continued canning and food preservation either out of tradition or as a means of preparing for the possibility of another depression, but overwhelmingly the post-war period signified a trend away from this type of work for farm women.⁷⁶

Farm women did not necessarily gain leisure time as a result of the shift away from food preservation. Instead, many took on off-farm work as a way to not only replace their own individual income lost with the professionalization of poultry, egg and vegetable production but as a way to increase family income to afford luxuries long enjoyed by nonfarmers. Moreover, the switch from a labor-intensive to a capital-intensive agriculture dramatically reduced farm-related work opportunities for women. In search of work, farm women pursued work in local towns or urban centers. Not only

⁷⁵ Ibid, 155.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 156.

did farm women have higher rates of out-migration than farm men in this period, they also had higher rates of off-farm work for those who stayed on the farm.⁷⁷ This new avenue of work enabled many farm men to dedicate their work time entirely to the farm and in many situations, the income from women's off-farm work floated the family farm through times of negative income. Sue Silvers, an Iowa farm woman, found work as a teacher with the primary goal of helping her husband overcome the rising costs of establishing a farm.⁷⁸ Women's off-farm work became valued not necessarily as an end unto itself, but more so as a means of aiding the economic stability and success of the farm. Women who provided this vital income prided themselves on helping the farm while farm men earning less income than their wives tended to focus on the non-monetary benefits of their farm work and raising a family on a farm.

For the farm women who stayed on the farm rather than pursue off-farm employment, their work by no means lessened as a result of new technologies adopted in the post-war era. Granted, most of the physically burdensome tasks of farm life and work disappeared. Nonetheless, farm women ended up spending the same number of hours working, just in other and sometimes new tasks. With farm men turning to off-farm work to supplement family income, farm tasks increasingly became the responsibility of farm women.⁷⁹ Milking dairy cows, feeding animals and other daily tasks remained or became the domain of farm women with husbands working off-farm jobs.

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, *Statistical Bulletin No. 176* (June 1956), found in File 24409, Thomas B. Curtis Records, WHMC; and "Married Women Top Single in Jobs," *New York Times* (Dec. 23, 1948).

⁷⁸ William M. Blair, "Costs Keeping 'Em Down on Farms," *New York Times* (March 6, 1958).

⁷⁹ Carolyn E. Sachs, *The Invisible Farmers: Women in Agricultural Production* (Rowland and Allanheld: Totowa, New Jersey, 1983), 42.

Yet, farm women found it difficult to receive simple recognition for their contributions. The professionalization of farm production also included particular cultural ideals. Despite sharing the work and often management responsibilities with farm women, farm men typically received the social status as “farmer” or “business operator.” Following this trend, farm women became seen increasingly as homemaker or mother, despite their continued contributions to the farm.⁸⁰ This resulted partly from the intensification of gendered work ideals as farms adopted technology which shifted work to the individual and away from the group. On top of that, the integration of farm people into mass American culture included ideals of domesticity for women. Aspiring to gain many of the advantages of an urban lifestyle, farm people took on many of the ideals as well.

For farm women in particular, the post-war transition to a technology-centered agricultural system created new stresses and strains. On the one hand, farm work became less physically demanding. But the new economics of agriculture required either increased dedication to raising the production and efficiency of the farm or finding outside sources of income to supplement and stabilize family income.⁸¹ In this situation, farm women were expected to contribute in new ways both on the farm by taking on farm duties as husbands picked up off-farm work or off the farm by finding their own non-farm employment. Either way, the reality farm women faced often did not match the social expectations developing in the post-war period. Perceived by many observers as becoming integrated into mass culture with clearly defined gender roles, farm women did not fit the social expectation of a domestic partner to their husband who provided the

⁸⁰ Sachs, *The Invisible Farmers*, 33; and Jellison, *Entitled to Power*, 148.

⁸¹ Blair, “Costs Keeping ‘Em Down on Farms,” *New York Times* (March 6, 1958).

income through work outside the home.⁸² The new realities of a technology-centered, capital-intensive agricultural economy precluded farm women from readily taking up the social expectations placed upon them. They nonetheless coincided their new work realities with their own identities based on farm women's roles of the past. For them, the new tasks did not represent a challenge or change from farm women's obligations in the past. Instead, the new farm duties or off-farm work represented simply a continuation of the responsibility to provide an economic contribution to the farm.⁸³ The new work, both on the farm and off by both men and women, became simply a means of coping with the new realities of farming in the post-war era revolutionized by new technology.

As much as farm people coped with the rapidly changing structure of agriculture by adjusting the way they lived, worked, and interacted, many people, not just those in farming, had to adjust their mentality, identity, or attitude in response to the radically altered reality of farming. More so than during any other period of rapid change, American agriculture in the post-World War II era experienced developments that not only changed production methods, but revolutionized farmers' identities and the way non-farmers viewed farm people. In this regard, the symbol of "the family farm," a concept that had been around at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, but

⁸² Jellison provides excellent discussion of the social expectations on farm women to become simply a relocated urban housewife. Jellison notes, "Just as the rhetoric of the postwar domestic ideal obscured the reality that an increased number of urban married women were working for pay outside the home, a rural version of the postwar ideal denied the reality that an increased number of farm women were spending more time away from the farmhouse in the years following World War II." (163)

⁸³ "Decries 'Farm Woman'," *New York Times* (Feb. 22, 1947); and Faith Corrigan, "Working Wives Claim Tradition," *New York Times* (March 25, 1955). For works on farm women's work identity see: Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); LuAnn Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

had not fully blossomed until the post-World War II period, came to take on its contemporary cultural significance. In doing so, it changed the rhetoric and policies of farm politics, as well as American identity.

Too often historians have projected onto the past this concept of the family farm and the more specific idea of saving the family farm. While based on historical concepts much older than itself, the concept of the family farm truly developed only in the context of the post-World War II period. Pre-World War II era references to the family farm held an entirely different meaning. In the early 20th century, the family farm meant farming in general, with little discernment between particular forms or structures.⁸⁴ Moreover, concerns for the “family farm” during the Progressive era indicated worry for the poverty and low standards of living commonly experienced on farms at that time. They did not ever conclude that family farms would disappear, only that farm people would continue to live depressing lives of toil, farming would be left to less capable, less intelligent farm people resulting in higher retail food costs, and that urban influences would overwhelm agrarian values.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ An analysis of early 20th century works reveals that most referred to “farm family,” a related, but different concept from “family farm.” In fact, references to “farm family” often implied that all farms had a family, that farming necessitated a family. For example, *Farm Economy; a Cyclopedia of Agriculture for the Practical Farmer and His Family* (Minneapolis: H.L. Baldwin, 1915) implies that a farmer does not farm without a family. Yet, many historians talk about the family farm throughout history, even though people in late 19th or early 20th century did not call it that. Projecting this concept onto other historical eras includes projecting particular values and cultural concepts.

⁸⁵ William Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974), 15, 66-7. A survey of newspaper articles from *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* between 1900 and 1940 yielded fewer than 120 references to the family farm, most of which used the term as a reference to a location, a synonym for “farm,” as part of coverage of unrelated news. Moreover, of the roughly four articles that discussed the growth of corporate farming, none indicated a fear of loss of family farms. “Finds Large Farms Fare Same As Rest,” *New York Times* (July 29, 1929) noted that corporate farming was such a small part of agriculture and its future still uncertain that its social impact was insignificant. A Survey of the *Missouri Farmer* shows that the first reference to the “family-size farm” in an article occurs in November of 1954. See Fred V. Heinkel, “Must Take Steps Now to Stop Forced ‘Sell-Out’ of Family-Size Farms,” *Missouri Farmer* (Nov. 1954).

Granted, some concerns, such as fear of declining agrarian influence in society and the migration of ambitious rural people continued into the post-war era from the turn of the twentieth century. However, historians have too often inaccurately portrayed attempts to improve farm living, for example during the progressive era, as an indication of popular concern to save a particular style of farming.⁸⁶ The main concerns of the Country Life Movement, helping farm people improve their productivity so that consumers had enough food and farm people did not have to live in toil were not the same as saving one form of agriculture from extinction or the tough competition from corporate farming. The concern at the turn of the 20th century was not that competition drove out farm people, but that farm living was so substandard only the least ambitious would stay on the farm. No one in the 1900s through the 1930s worried that farming would become too concentrated or that the nation would actually lose millions of farmers due to technology. For the Country Life Movement, technology was a solution to the ills of farming.⁸⁷ As Gary Comstock noted,

'Saving' the family farm has not been an issue in America until the last few decades. Prior to World War II, while everyone talked about the virtues of the independent, family-sized farm, no one regarded this hallowed institution as in any kind of danger.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Examples of this projection of ideals or symbols before their time include: Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*; Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Susan Sessions Rugh, *Our Common History: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth Century Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Donald Pisani, *From the Family Farm to Agribusiness: The Irrigation Crusade in California and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Marilyn Watkins, *Rural Democracy: Family Farmers and Politics in Western Washington, 1890-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981).

⁸⁷ Bowers, *The Country Life Movement*, 38.

⁸⁸ Gary Comstock, ed, *Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), xi-xii. To say that saving the family farm became the primary goal of post-war agricultural policy is not to say that people did not perceive of the corporate threat to family farms before World War II. The main worry during the Progressive Era, however, as seen through the Country Life

As far back as the time of colonial America, residents of this land held farm people in a particularly high regard. Thomas Jefferson, perhaps the most well-known agrarian supporter, believed the new nation of the United States would maintain a superior form of government only as long as farm people comprised a majority of the population. To be certain, Jefferson and others defined farm people to include white, non-slave, non-tenant men who owned their own farms and thus, depended upon no one for their livelihood. To him and many others, farmers deserved higher social status for a number of reasons. Farmers, unlike any other group of the time, provided the one necessity that all other citizens could not provide to themselves, namely food. Farmers held in their control the literal lifeblood of the nation, and yet, American farmers never sought to use this monopoly to their undue advantage. Instead, they worked tirelessly to provide a dependable supply of food to a growing population. Moreover, agricultural commodities proved a vital trade tool that supplied the young nation with ample income useful for development. Finally, unlike any other occupational group, farmers worked close to the soil to provide the bountiful gifts of God's grace. For Jefferson, farmers truly were God's chosen people, if ever he had one.

Farmers, as a people, also faced unique circumstances that seemed to make them not only stronger, but more independent in spirit, making them all the more suitable as active participants in democratic government. Again, referring only to those farmers who owned their own farm, Jefferson argued that farmers developed a particular strength from

Movement through the 1920s was improving the standard of living of rural people and increasing their productivity to meet growing food demands of the growing urban population. In the 1930s, the main agricultural policy goal involved stabilizing the entire agricultural economy in order to help all farmers as well as to stabilize the entire economy suffering through the Great Depression. In neither situation does saving a particular type of agriculture from competition or extinction become a concern.

having to continually battle the inconsistencies and difficulties brought on by the weather. Coupled with the fact that farm people lived in almost total isolation from the rest of society and each other, farm people developed a unique strength and determination. Moreover, Americans viewed farmers as uniquely isolated from the market.⁸⁹ Therefore, they could be uniquely independent and even indifferent to the world around them. They could withstand difficult economic times when others could not. Conversely, city people appeared weak in comparison to farm people. The attitudes of Populists of the late 19th century indicated a measured, but unveiled disdain for urban Americans because they lacked the independence and fortitude of will that had become so symbolic of rural Americans. The concept of urbanite as unequal reached its zenith with the Populist movement when William Jennings Bryan, in his eloquent “Cross of Gold” speech as 1896 Presidential candidate for the Populist Party, alluded to urban residents as parasites.

While the concept of the agrarian myth had been around for quite sometime by the middle of the 20th century, it had also lost its cultural power due to the changing structure of American society and economy. Not only had the basis for agrarian exceptionalism through the agrarian myth become obsolete, new factors arose that led Americans in general and farmers in particular to grab hold of the new idea of the family farm as the paradigm through which Americans viewed agriculture and through whose

⁸⁹ Between the 1970s and 1990s agricultural historians debated the market independence of early American farmers. See: Michael Merrill, “Cash is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the U.S.,” *Radical History Review* (Winter 1977): 42-71; James Henretta, “Families and Farms: Mentalite’ in Pre-industrial America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (1980): 3-32; Winifred Rothenberg, “The Market and the Massachusetts Farmer, 1750-1855,” *Journal of Economic History* (1981); Carole Shammas, “How Self-Sufficient was Early America?” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1982); Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the Agrarian Myth in the Early Republic,” *The Journal of American History* 68 (March 1982): 833-49; Alan Kulikoff, “The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (Jan. 1989): 120-44; and Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

rhetoric farm policy developed. Unlike farming in the 18th or 19th centuries, farming of the post-World War II era could no longer be characterized as free from market forces or isolated from the world. As a result of the technological revolution, farm people became as entwined into markets as any other occupational group.

By the 1940s, the trend toward market integration, which had begun in the 19th century, had reached its completion as farm people no longer stood comfortably distant from the worrisome fluxuations of prices in either products bought or sold. Through the technological improvements in pesticides and herbicides, farmers gained much more control over the vagaries of nature. Moreover, government programs developed under the New Deal of the 1930s to help farmers overcome the economic catastrophe associated with bad weather patterns of droughts, floods, severe weather and low market prices all challenged the agrarian myth ideal of farm people as uniquely independent. And finally, the post-war era saw a quick reversal in farm people's attitudes towards urban America and urban Americans. Farm people in the post-war era continued to turn to urban areas, once considered parasitic, not only for markets for farm commodities, but more importantly, as a refuge for those unable to keep up on the technological treadmill. For the millions of farm people who migrated to urban areas in the 1940s through the 1960s, decrying the lack of independence of city living seemed short-sighted considering they had never lived such a high standard of living in all their years on the farm. For those who stayed in agriculture, taking a decidedly anti-urban stance did not play well when urban consumers provided the bulk of farm income through retail food purchases.

Not only had the old conditions of farming reversed themselves to make the agrarian myth an inapplicable cultural ideal, but new conditions unique to the post-war

era developed to lead people, farm and non-farm alike, to seek a new paradigm through which they could not only view the changing condition of agriculture and in context to other factors, but through which they could judge the direction of farming in America. Considering the role the agrarian myth has had in shaping Americans' ideals in the past, the fact that so many Americans used the agrarian myth to form their identities and the fact that ideals often changes more slowly than technology or economics, the new paradigm came to hold considerable importance.

Unlike American farming through the early 20th century which until 1940 generally experienced continued, albeit slowing population growth, the post-war years marked a major change in direction with considerable rural population decline brought on by the rapid and widespread rural migration of millions of farm people to urban areas. For the first time in the nation's history, people began to worry not simply that rural people represented a declining portion of the American population, but that the farm population would actually decline to a point that would leave only a concentrated, corporate farm structure.⁹⁰ In their resolutions passed at their 1956 Convention, the Missouri Farmers Association for the first time noted, "We are alarmed because of the great number of people leaving the farms of our State and Nation."⁹¹ The Truman Administration perhaps more directly explained the general concern with economic impacts of farm population decline. "Inadequate income for so many farm families

⁹⁰ See the Appendix for a U.S. Census Bureau data table denoting farm population, farm size, and farm number trends throughout the 20th century. One will see from this table that farm numbers increased through the first part of the 20th century until 1920, experienced a short period of farm number decline through 1928, returned to farm expansion from 1929 through 1935 before beginning a slow decline in farm numbers that increased dramatically after World War II.

⁹¹ "Resolutions Passed by the 1956 Convention," *Missouri Farmer* (Sept. 1956), 8.

threatens the stability of the whole economy.”⁹² Even urban workers held concern as they recognized the economic impact of losing 600,000 potential customers of agricultural-specific products, while seeing increased urban job competition, through the consolidation of farming and the migration of rural people. The *Labor’s Daily* agreed with the Family Farms Subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee when it warned “that the disappearance of 600,000 family farms in the last four years is a serious threat to the American economy.”⁹³

Furthermore, this post-war phenomenon could negatively affect the nation politically and culturally. Through a policy review report, the Truman Administration noted, “farm families, as we have seen have moral values to offer that are of great importance to American democracy.”⁹⁴ In light of this population shift, the new concept of the family farm, and especially the goal to save the family farm, diverged considerably from the values associated with the agrarian myth. The earlier paradigm held cities in lower regard compared to rural areas. The characteristics of city life were not to be envied, but avoided. Under the concept of the family farm, city standards of living for farm families became a goal. In noting the “economic inequality between farm and city dweller” as a principal cause for the rural migration, the Missouri Farmers Association implied that one solution to saving the family farm would involve making farm living more like that of urban areas.⁹⁵ Oddly enough, this is exactly the solution proposed by the

⁹² U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Family Farm Policy Review: Provisional Report and Tentative Recommendations of the Department of Agriculture’s Family Farm Policy Review Subcommittee*, compiled with the cooperation of non-governmental organizations (Washington: GPO, 1951), vii.

⁹³ “600,000 Family Farms Disappear,” *Labor’s Daily* (August 23, 1956), found in File 1151, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁹⁴ Family Farm Policy Review, iv.

⁹⁵ “Resolutions Passed by the 1956 Convention,” *Missouri Farmer* (Sept. 1956), 8.

Country Life Movement at the turn of the 20th century. Influential agriculturalist Howard Doane noted, “The discontent of the farmer grows out of constantly being reminded by actual sights and sounds of the superior conveniences and luxuries of the city dweller.”⁹⁶ Moreover, the Truman Administration concluded, “Farm youth, like city youth, want the material advantages of twentieth century living. To have these advantages, farm people must have parity of income with other groups.”⁹⁷

Defining the concept of the family farm, along with the goal of saving this preferred form of agriculture, required an opposing form against which family farms could be compared. Under the agrarian myth, independent ownership of land deserved special status. Slavery-based agriculture, along with tenant farming, did not qualify as part of the agrarian ideal. Developments as a result of technological changes in the post-World War II era, however, led to further redefining of the agricultural paradigm away from the agrarian myth which celebrated the general idea of farm ownership and toward the family farm which focused on a particular type of farm ownership.

With the advent of gasoline powered tractors, electricity, hybrid seeds, pesticides and herbicides starting in the early 20th century, agricultural production drifted away from its dependence on labor and toward a dependence on capital. No longer was the fieldwork capacity of one farm dictated by the number of people, primarily family members, providing labor. Electricity did the same for barnyard activities. Herbicides entirely eliminated cultivations of some crops, again reducing labor dependence. Under these new circumstances, not only could farm size increase dramatically without labor

⁹⁶ Howard Doane and Neils W. Brown, “The Industrial Revolution Reaches the Farm,” n.d., File 6, D. Howard Doane Papers, WHMC.

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Family Farm Policy Review* (Washington: GPO, 1951), vii.

limitations, but the new scale of agriculture, one determined by capital, presented an opportunity for corporations to enter agriculture. Hybrid seeds implemented in the 1920s, coupled with pesticides, increased the profit potential of agricultural production, creating even more incentive for corporations to step into farming.

To be sure, corporate farming did exist in the early years of the 20th century.⁹⁸ However, such farms still required the ready availability of human or mechanical power to allow for a farm size larger than what could be handled by the labor of one family. Indicative of this fact, corporate farms in the early 20th century were limited to the open plains areas where steam and then early gasoline powered tractors could prove more effective than animal power, cattle ranches of the Southwest that were economically viable in larger acreages because of land conditions and fruit and vegetable farmers of the west that relied on a ready supply of migrant workers for harvest.⁹⁹

The dry conditions of the plains, coupled with the flat and open terrain, allowed early tractors to be effective where in any other environment such as wet conditions, hills or relatively small fields, such equipment would and did fail miserably. Moreover, only wheat farming of the plains region could be conducted on the corporate level without the advent of electricity necessary to replace labor in farmyard chores. Most other farming such as dairy, pork and vegetables required high amounts of human labor throughout the year, not just during a harvest period.¹⁰⁰ Thus, animal power, and hence the high amount

⁹⁸ For coverage of early 20th century corporate attempts at farming see Deb. Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁹⁹ Corporate farms should not be confused with slave plantations of the antebellum South or cattle ranches of the plains or west. Key defining characteristics include the source of capital, form of management and structure of labor or work.

¹⁰⁰ While some corporate vegetable farms existed in California that depended upon large amounts of hired labor, such farms were few and posed little threat of expanding into other regions, creating little concern.

of manpower necessary to operate the animals, continued to dominate farming until the 1940s and 1950s in all other regions, including the South, Midwest, Northeast and the Pacific. Even corporate farms dependant upon large amounts of human labor developed infrequently because of management difficulties. The new tractors of the post-war era included vast improvements in power and durability all the while in a smaller size, making them better suited to smaller fields, wetter conditions, and more hilly terrain. Moreover, not until after World War II, with the extensive efforts of the Rural Electrification Administration during the 1930s through the 1950s, did a majority of farms benefit from the labor saving power of electricity.

With conditions primed due to technological developments, corporate farming took off in the post-war era. Not that corporate farms became a dominant force in agriculture by any means. As late as 1959, only 1 percent of all farms were corporate, consisting of 8 percent of all farmland.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, the rapid growth of this small, but radically different scale of agriculture fueled popular concerns about the direction of agriculture in America.¹⁰² The number of corporate farms started between 1960 and 1968 matched the total number of corporate farms started during all previous time periods.¹⁰³ What would it mean to all Americans, not just farmers, if the entire structure of agriculture eventually became owned by corporations? The blurring of the line between corporate and family farming in the post-war period only complicated the matter.

¹⁰¹ “The Family Farm Still Topping List,” *New York Times* (Aug. 9, 1959).

¹⁰² Jon Lauck, *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly: the Political Economy of Grain Belt Farming, 1953-1980* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6. The fact that many of the corporate farms started at this time were expanded family farms created a difficult tension for farm observers, one that will be addressed in later chapters. See also Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 127.

The agrarian myth, which taught that American culture and democracy depended on a large number of land owners, led Americans to voice fear of the increasing size of farms and presence of corporations. The 1950 Missouri Farmers Association Convention Resolutions provide one example of this concern. “Unless [this trend] is arrested, the final outcome will be large corporation farming with much absentee ownership.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in 1946, the Senate Small Business Committee, unrelated to agriculture, announced their opinion that small farms, and therefore certainly not corporate, were better than larger farms.¹⁰⁵ Popular awareness of the community effects of corporate vs. family farming resulted from Walter Goldschmidt’s report published in 1947 comparing the attributes of two California communities, Arvin and Dinuba, and concluding that corporate farming lowered home and private business ownership, community involvement, church attendance, and overall standard of living.¹⁰⁶

Corporate farming alone did not lead to the rapid growth in popularity of the family farm or the tremendous “traction” the issue of saving the family farm had with the general population in the post-war years. Perhaps the biggest issue facing all Americans in the 1940s through the 1960s and beyond, the Cold War encroached upon every aspect of life, not just the obvious aspects of foreign affairs or military planning. The ideological battle between communism and democracy came to define the nation and every issue played out in this era. Historians have detailed the intersection of Cold War

¹⁰⁴ “Resolutions 32nd Annual Convention,” Missouri Farmers Association (Aug. 7-8, 1950), Columbia, MO., found in File 3576, A.S.J. Carnahan Papers, WHMC.

¹⁰⁵ “Small Farm Held of Greater Value,” *New York Times* (Dec. 23, 1946).

¹⁰⁶ Goldschmidt’s work, *As You Sow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), sparked a firestorm of debate that has continued to this day in the field of Rural Sociology. More importantly, his work indicates a general awareness of corporate farming and a popular concern over its impact on not just farmers, but all community residents.

tensions with a number of seemingly independent concepts ranging from the strategies of domestic civil rights groups to the defining of family to the changes in pop culture.¹⁰⁷

The Cold War led people to redefine how they interacted, how to act in public and even how to act in private. In similar fashion, the Cold War reframed the ways in which people viewed farming, including their most basic assumptions and values. The concept of the family farm grew again only in light of a recognizably and considerably different form.¹⁰⁸ In the midst of the Cold War, one dramatically different form was the collective farming system of the Soviet Union. Under these collectives, the Soviet leadership ordered farm people to work on large, state owned farms. The goal was to increase production through systematic production. The result, however, was failing production with years of starvation for millions of Soviet residents.

Considering the magnitude of the ideological battle between the Soviet Union and the United States and the importance of food production in every society, the concept of the family farm became one that helped Americans not only set themselves, as a society, apart from the Soviets, but to use in public relations efforts while trying to garner the alliance of third world nations. In reviewing agricultural policy in light of the Cold War, Charles Brannan, Secretary of Agriculture for the Truman Administration highlighted the new role of this family farm concept in the Cold War era.

¹⁰⁷ See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Cynthia Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003); and Richard Fried, *The Russians are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ So far I have declared two opposites to the family farm, one corporate, the other collective. To make sense of this, think of farm structure options as on a one dimensional continuum similar to the continuum we use to define political ideologies. On the farming continuum, we can place corporate farming on the extreme right, and collective farming on the extreme left. Family farming stands in the middle, possessing one opposite to the extreme left and another opposite to the extreme right.

The American family farm pattern is one of the Nation's main exhibits in the world struggle for men's minds and one of the examples we hold out for all the world to see. We seek to extend the benefits and advantages of our system to rural populations elsewhere. To be successful in this, we should make sure that our own pattern is the best possible one.¹⁰⁹

Brannan's language further denotes the novelty of this concept of the family farm by calling on everyone to reexamine farm programs through the new lens of the family farm. "We're asking that everyone who is seriously interested in agriculture take a new look at all the farm programs and activities, using the family farm as a measuring stick."¹¹⁰

The American public came to celebrate the "family" component of agriculture when before the start of the Cold War they had little need to do so. The concept provided comfort to many in light of the potential threat of Soviet style production.¹¹¹ Moreover, the family farm allowed Americans to claim moral superiority over their Soviet opponents in the race to claim allies in the long-lasting world struggle.

The combination of new forces in the post-war agriculture resulting from the adoption of new technologies included the rural-to-urban migration and true viability and growth of corporate agriculture coupled with Cold War tensions led Americans for the first time to seek a family-based system of agriculture. The symbol or image of the family farm helped people to cope with the radical changes occurring in agriculture as well as the changes occurring outside of agriculture. For the millions of urban Americans

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "The Family Farm's Future: You Can Help Determine It," (Washington: GPO, June 1951), Pamphlet, 5, found in Box 10, Charles Brannan Papers, Harry S Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri (hereafter Truman Library).

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 6. I will examine further the Cold War impact on agriculture and the concept of the family farm in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

¹¹¹ Lauck, *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly*, noted, "The disappearance of the American farmer, long thought to be the anchor of the republic, proved especially frightening during the postwar challenge of international communism and what many viewed as the wholesale assault on moral and social institutions in the 1960s." (5)

facing a world dramatically different from the one in which they grew up, the idea of an agricultural system that still valued the time-honored institution of family allowed them to take comfort in an image of something that had not changed, at least not in their minds.¹¹² Rural Sociologist Carl Taylor noted that for people in this group, “The romantic appeal of the symbol contrasts strangely with the economic fortunes of the reality.”¹¹³

For those who did recognize the revolution in agriculture, again the symbol of the family farm allowed them to see such radical changes not as challenging existing values, such as the agrarian myth, but as perpetuating such values within a new context. This became the case particularly for the millions of farm families that migrated to urban areas in the post-war era. This group, despite the change in residential areas, held onto values and beliefs garnered from their years on the farm.¹¹⁴ In both instances, the symbol of the family farm helped people believe society maintained older values despite the changes that occurred. It also helped them to alleviate concern about not being about to keep up with the changes. Taylor again noted, “We borrow emotion-laden terms to hide our lack of knowledge about the very thing we extol.”¹¹⁵ Political scientists Charles Elder and Roger Cobb could have been describing the development of the symbol of the family farm in the post-war era when they noted,

¹¹² Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 104. Vidich and Bensman noted, “The romanticization of rural life in press and radio reflects the need of the urban dweller to conceive of rural life as simpler and freer from the complexities, tensions and anxieties which he faces in his own world. Rural life is thus conceived as a counterimage which highlights his own situation.” (104)

¹¹³ Carl C. Taylor, “The Family Farm in the New Society,” *Rural Sociology* 19 (1954), 271. Taylor quoted A. Whitney Griswold, *Farming and Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 5.

¹¹⁴ Norval Glenn and Lester Hill, Jr., “Rural-Urban Difference in Attitudes and Behavior in the United States,” in *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences, and Alternatives*, ed. Richard Rodefeld (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 352.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, “The Family Farm in the New Society,” *Rural Sociology* 19 (1954), 274.

New symbols are likely to be created when people find themselves in novel situations or confronted with unfamiliar circumstances—circumstances which for them are without clear parallel.¹¹⁶

This new symbol came to hold a powerful influence in not only in the political world, but in the process of policy development as well. The symbol of the family farm became a useful tool to politicians seeking not only rural votes, but votes from urban residents as well who still held onto the idea of an agriculture dominated by many small landholders. For these politicians, the family farm became the new code to signify the agrarian myth. For voters, politicians' promise to uphold the family farm meant they supported older values in a society confronted by massive change. The symbol similarly impacted the development of specific policies throughout the post-war period aimed at helping a particular form of agricultural production over any other. The rhetoric, compounded by its unclear definition and the often contradictory values Americans held toward agriculture led to a mishmash of policies. These policies oftentimes contradicted and worked against one another or made little to no change in overall policy despite the heated rhetoric.¹¹⁷

As the post-war agricultural revolution continued to take its path toward equipment and capital and away from dependence on labor, concern arose regarding the stress put on farm families on the individual level as well as the difficulties experienced on the macro level. These trends collectively became encapsulated in the term, the Farm Problem. This singular concept in fact represented multiple issues. Debate raged between policy leaders as to which problem acted as the foundation for all other

¹¹⁶ Charles Elder and Roger Cobb, *The Political Use of Symbols* (New York: Longman, 1983), 31.

¹¹⁷ I will cover the specific path of agricultural policy development in chapter 4 and 5.

problems.¹¹⁸ After all, it seemed that no matter which problem leaders deemed the source of all other problems, solving the original problem would, in theory, solve all others. This naive outlook resulted from the failure among most observers to see agricultural markets and people as dynamic, and responding to new factors and realities. Rather, observers viewed both markets and people as remaining static, despite dynamic influences.

A large number of farm policy leaders declared inadequate income as the problem.¹¹⁹ Many in this group argued that improving farm income through subsidies would help. However, doing so would only add profit incentive for more efficient corporations to enter farming. Some agriculture observers declared instability in farm costs and incomes as the problem.¹²⁰ With this problem, a commonly proposed solution involved government aid when market prices fall. Here too, such a solution, while effective in a static society, would only lead to further competition and thus difficulty for millions of farmers, through inducement of more capital to enter agriculture. In response, some observers portrayed oversupply or overproduction of farm commodities as the main

¹¹⁸ Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 118; Dale Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture: Public Policy in a Democratic Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 81; Murray R. Benedict, *Can We Solve the Farm Problem? An Analysis of Federal Aid to Agriculture* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1955), xv; Earl O. Heady, "Major Agricultural Problems," in *Urban Responses to Agricultural Change*, ed. Clyde Kohn (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 12; and Don Paarlberg, *American Farm Policy: A Case Study of Centralized Decision-Making* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), 55.

¹¹⁹ Leonard Hastings Schoff, *A National Agricultural Policy: For All the People of the United States* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 45; Lauren Soth, *Farm Trouble* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), v; and Heady, "Major Agricultural Problems," *Urban Responses*, 12.

¹²⁰ Don Paarlberg, *American Farm Policy: A Case Study of Centralized Decision-Making* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), 78; Murray Benedict, *Can We Solve the Farm Problem?* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1955), xix; and A. Gordon Ball, "Why Adjustment is Difficult," *Farm Policy Forum* (Fall 1957), 24.

problem.¹²¹ Meanwhile, another group argued farm resources were used inefficiently, leading to low incomes for millions of farm families.¹²² For these groups removing excess inputs from agriculture seemed the solution, however depending on how accomplished, that would lead to either rising food costs or an actual improvement in overall efficiency and production which would only further depress prices. Finally, a related wing of the farm problem debate concluded that the problem lay not with the structure of agriculture, but with farmers' expectations for a higher standard of living and their refusal to recognize that in order to have an urban lifestyle, farm people had to match the productivity of urban people.¹²³

Considering the number of problems farm families faced in the new agricultural structure and the considerable disagreement people held in seeking to explain the origins of these problems it was a wonder any cohesiveness remained to unify the varying explanations under one title. However, the deep disagreement in explaining the farm problem nonetheless held dire consequences for agricultural policy development and the people policy leaders intended to assist. In any case, the large debate over defining the problem highlights not only the fact that farm people suffered numerous problems in the post-war era, but that the breakdown that occurred in the problem definition step in the agricultural policy process during this period held appalling consequences. In fact, the

¹²¹ Andrews, *The Farmer's Dilemma*, 2; and Geoffrey S. Shepherd, *Farm Policy: New Directions* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1964), 99.

¹²² Kenneth L. Bachman, "Changes in Scale in Commercial Farming and Their Implications," *Journal of Farm Economics* 34 (May 1952), 168; Hastings Schoof, *A National Agricultural Policy*, 27; Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies, and Manpower, *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze*, 87th Cong., 1st sess., (Washington: GPO, 1961), 212; and Earl O. Heady et. al., *Roots of the Farm Problem* (Ames: Iowa St. University Press, 1965), vi.

¹²³ O.R. Johnson, "Public Policies Exerting Significant Economic Influence on Agriculture," Paper prepared for the Farm Bureau-Agricultural Economics Conference (July 1957), 181, Found in the O.R. Johnson Papers, Ellis Library, Special Collections, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

breakdown at the problem definition stage, more so than any other problem, explains the failure of agricultural policy to adequately address the condition of farm people in the 1940s through the 1960s.¹²⁴

While debate raged between agricultural policy leaders over the origins of the farm problem and potential solutions, non-farmers developed a discordant mix of genuine concern for family farms and yet a rising frustration with the popular focus on a symbol rooted in images often taken from the past. To them, the agricultural revolution had its victims, but it also had its beneficiaries as well. At the height of concern for a style of farming represented by the concept of the family farm, millions not involved in agriculture observed a widening disconnect between that image and the reality of farming. Noting this development at the time, political scientist Ross Talbot commented,

For some decades the farmer has been thriving on the residue of the belief in agricultural fundamentalism—the belief that there is something peculiarly beneficent if not sacred about farm life and the family farm. A quite contrary picture of the American farmer seems to be forming in the minds of the urbanite and suburbanite. This view is the “not so hayseed farmer” driving a Cadillac, cashing his ‘huge’ government checks, and prospering off the taxes which the city fellow has been paying.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ The important role of problem definition in the policy process is noted in David Rochefort and Roger W. Cobb, “Problem Definition: An Emerging Perspective,” in *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda*, ed. Rochefort and Cobb (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1994), 5 and 15. Rochefort and Cobb also note the importance of problem definition in conditioning society to perceive the problem as important or unimportant, the group receiving the aid as worthy or unworthy and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of proposed solutions. (23-24). See also: Gary Mucciarconi, “Problem Definition and Special Interest Politics in Tax Policy and Agriculture,” *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1994), 117-137. Mucciarconi notes that if the problem facing farmers is defined as originating from impersonal economic or governmental forces, farmers could be portrayed as genuine victims and thus, deserving aid. (134) See also: Don Paarlberg, *American Farm Policy* (1964), 55.

¹²⁵ Ross Talbot, “The Changing Political Climate in Which National Farm Policy is Made,” *Farm Policy Forum* 12 (1959-60), 27.

Nonfarmers could not help but look at the changes occurring in agriculture, from production technology and implementation of business practices to the vast improvement in standard of living and ask if there was anything unique about agriculture.¹²⁶

Building, heating, lighting, sanitation of the farm are planned on the same lines as those of the city. It is hard to believe that anyone would want these changes undone. The question remains whether, taken together, this urbanization has changed the character of the farmer in any way that should give us concern.¹²⁷

Despite the popular concern for the condition of family farms, as highlighted in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, millions of Americans could not see any particular reason to show more concern for this farm group than for any other group.¹²⁸ And as farmers and farm organizations increasingly looked and acted more like all other businesses many people came to question any special treatment afforded farmers by the federal government.

¹²⁶ Lyle W. Shannon, "Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy and Acceptable Rates of Change," in *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 275; Don Paarlberg, *American Farm Policy* (1964), 5 and John H. MacMillan, Jr., "Freeing the Farms," *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 8, 1956). MacMillan noted, "The actual family farm has become a modern business."

¹²⁷ William Ernest Hocking, "A Philosophy of Life for the American Farmer (and Others)," *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences and Alternatives*, ed. Richard Rodefeld (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 1067.

¹²⁸ Richard Rutter, "Farm Income Up Over 2 Decades," *New York Times* (July 19, 1959). Rutter noted, "Despite occasional setbacks, many farmers have 'never had it so good' as in recent years." He also noted Net income and expenditures have actually risen at a faster rate over recent years for farm families than for their city cousins. This is a strange sort of 'decline'."

“As American as Barn-raising and Hot Dogs”

Cooperative associations of farmers permits the operation of a farm as a family-size production unit, yet have the benefits of efficient marketing and purchasing through their own farmer cooperative and marketing associations. Thus are farmer cooperatives a major factor in maintaining the American way of life in agriculture...The continued existence of American family-type agriculture was, and still is, threatened by the great industrial and mechanical age in which we live. Instead of promoting American family-type agriculture to produce food and fiber, the industrial and mechanical age breeds corporate-type agriculture or collectivist agriculture such as exists in Russia.¹

In 1951, farmers across America found themselves in a political battle that just 40 years earlier would have been unimaginable. Then again, the changes occurring in farming since the start of the 20th century and their social, political and economic consequences also seemed unimaginable. Farm cooperatives, long a part of not only farm business but also of government policy aimed at helping farm people improve their income, began to be challenged by private business leaders in light of many post-World War II developments. Unlike farming and farm cooperatives in the early 20th century, both farmers and their cooperatives grew rapidly in size and scale in the 1940s through the 1960s as agriculture experienced its revolution in technology. Mirroring Americans' concern that the industrialized family farm failed to adhere to the historically-based image, the growth of coops after World War II led many Americans to view coops as failing to live up to their historic role.

The post-war growth of coops and their divergence from historic practices led to a battle centered on the federal government's unique tax structure established for farm

¹ “Statement by F. V. Heinkel, President of the Missouri Farmers Association,” March 1, 1951, found in File 11885, O.R. Johnson Papers, WHMC.

cooperatives. Each year farm coops returned money to members based on the amount of business they did with the coop. Known as patronage dividends, this return was basically a rebate. After co-ops calculated their operating expenses for the year, they returned to farmers any income over that amount. The Federal government did not tax such patronage returns on the basis that the return resulted not from investment, but from overcharges. Moreover, the Department of the Treasury viewed the return as money saved and not necessarily earned (despite Benjamin Franklin's ubiquitous quote, "a penny saved is a penny earned.")

Increasingly throughout the post-war period, as farms and coops grew, cooperatives would hold onto patronage for a few years to use toward funding expansion projects. Private business owners perceived this post-war coop expansion as a problem not only in the form of increased competition, but competition that had easy access to untaxed funds. Coops' use of patronage came to mirror private businesses' use of profit to expand, yet without getting held to Federal tax laws. This meant coops could gather investment money without having to take a cut from taxes. Moreover, while early coops limited their activities to clearly delineated farm-related business such as feed grinding, farm retail supply and commodity shipping, post-war coops expanded into areas less distinctively agriculture-centered such as insurance and oil refining and oftentimes served non-farmers along the way. The competition these coops brought to private business interests led for-profit business owners to challenge federal tax policy toward farm cooperatives through the lobbying group known as the National Tax Equality Association. This development would have been unlikely without the agricultural revolution of the post-war era.

Two further post-war developments added tremendous tension to this otherwise clear-cut tax-policy debate. First, the development and growth of the Cold War added a foreign policy context. The fear of anything remotely related to or looking like communism helped frame the farm coop tax debate as an issue of finding the best policy to encourage American entrepreneurialism in light of the Cold War collectivism antagonist. Second, concern that the ideal family farm would disappear similarly influenced not only the rhetoric involved in this debate, but the end result as well. Moreover, debate raged over the fairness of the tax law or alternatives presented by opponents. The arena of fairness rhetoric became again another major battlefield in the war over tax policy.

The story of this often overlooked aspect of American tax policy can tell us a lot about American agriculture, people's perceptions of farms and cooperatives, and the intersection of the Cold War atmosphere with the post-war agricultural revolution. Moreover, the rhetoric used in this battle as well as the actual results add further insight into another aspect of agricultural policy, that of Federal tax structure, and how competing values play out to determine priority. This was not simply a battle over money between competing interests. For millions of Americans watching this rhetorical and policy battle from the late 1940s through the 1960s, at the core stood the issue of which ideal to value more than the other.² Truly, the fight over taxes can be seen as a larger debate over which values the nation ought to support. Should the Federal government prefer uninhibited competition which could threaten the survival of family farms? Should the government seek policies that disproportionately aid one business

² The role of competition between values plays out in further areas and will receive coverage in chapters 4 and 5 discussing particular agricultural policy developments in the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations.

group, namely family farmers, over others for the sake of sentiment or cultural iconography? Moreover, how should the federal government maintain fairness between competing groups, especially when one of the groups holds such cultural significance, yet faces increasingly difficult economic circumstances? Further compounding this dilemma was the fact that farms and their cooperatives radically changed after World War II. Did the agrarian myth, the justification for federal support of farm cooperatives, still apply once farmers and their cooperatives had grown into extremely large businesses?³ This tax policy debate allows us to view the changing attitudes people had toward farming as it morphed into a full-fledged business operation.

While the debate over farm cooperative tax policy occurred across the U.S. throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s, there were in fact, many localized battlegrounds between state level cooperatives and their state level opponents. To indicate the national scope of this issue, I will discuss how this debate played out at the national level. However, a study focused at the state or local level could provide benefits not available in a study that takes a survey approach to this nation-wide issue. While national political and judicial leaders determined the final decisions, the rhetoric and debate became often

³ Surprisingly little has been written on the growth of farm cooperatives or the cultural consequences of rapid technological and economic developments in agriculture, particularly in the post-World War II period. One work, Victoria Saker Woeste's, *The Farmers' Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) examines California raisin cooperatives between the Civil War and World War II and the way in which the rapid growth of the raisin industry and the Sunmaid cooperative in that period "exploited and undermined the myth of the Jeffersonian agrarian farmer." (1) Woeste's study, while provocative and thoroughly engaging, is fairly limited in its application to areas outside of the California raisin industry. The raisin industry in California rarely, if ever, typified popular notions of Jeffersonian agrarianism. Typical concepts of "average" American farms usually involved, in some form or another, ideas of self-sufficiency and farmers or families operating individually, usually in field crops or animal husbandry typical of the Midwest, Great Plains, South, and Northeast. Woeste's study considers changes in cultural concepts during what is considered the second agricultural revolution, roughly from 1877-1917. While accurately considered a revolution and worthy of study, the corresponding technological changes had a comparatively smaller impact on the overall direction of agriculture in social and economic terms than the technological changes occurring after World War II. More importantly, popular attitudes of farming did not become entirely complicated by industrialization and rural population loss until the 1940s.

times more vivid and intense at the state or local level. Therefore, to add depth to our understanding of this issue I will spend considerable time examining this debate as it played out between one state level farm cooperative, the Missouri Farmers Association, and its in-state opponent on this issue, the Tax Equality Committee of Eastern Missouri.

To fully comprehend the significance of the post-war agricultural and political changes and their impact on cooperatives as well as popular support for Federal policies that aimed to assist farm cooperatives, we must first look at some of the initial ideas that led to the origins of coops, government support for coops, and farmer and popular perception of coops. Shortly after World War I, Congress passed the Capper-Volstead Act. Considered the “Magna Carta” of agriculture, this act provided coops with legal protection from charges of monopolistic practices under the Sherman Act which had until that time prohibited the combined selling or purchasing of goods through cooperatives. It is easy to understand the justification for passage at that time of such a monumental law. Still a sizeable portion of the national population, farmers, through their voting power, succeeded in getting the attention of Congressmen. The United States remained a rural nation as late as 1920. It was during this time, moreover, that representatives from farming districts united across party lines to form the farm bloc, a cohesive alliance that succeeded in passing laws such as Capper-Volstead that aided the farmers they represented. This farm bloc quickly disintegrated in the post-World War II era as the massive rural-to-urban migration decimated the power of rural districts in Congress.⁴

It was not simply a matter of considerable farm political power that explains the passage of Capper-Volstead, however. The lack of opposition from representatives of

⁴ Despite this population shift, rural political power at the state level continued well into the 1960s due to the refusal of states to reapportion. This issue will receive more coverage in chapter 6.

urban districts, not to mention a quietness on the part of urban Americans regarding this law suggests a couple of important facts. First, urban consumers did not worry that farmers, through cooperatives, would take advantage of their special status and collude to raise food prices. This is quite impressive considering the then recent experience during World War I in which farm commodity prices and hence, retail food prices rose dramatically.⁵ As the farm economy tanked in the aftermath of World War I due to world overproduction, many urbanites accepted the idea of allowing farmers to regain lost income by taking control of more stages of the food delivery process through cooperatives. At the time Americans perceived farm people as the innocent victims of middlemen and corporations that took advantage of unorganized farmers to cut into their profits. In hearings regarding the tax situation of farm cooperatives, Carl Oechsle, Assistant Secretary of Domestic Affairs in the Department of Commerce, noted the situation of farmers and the popular perception of their problems.

In those days farms were often small, poorly managed, and undercapitalized business operations which were at the mercy of unscrupulous middlemen in the marketing of crops and the purchase of supplies. Under the best circumstances, the farmer suffered the problems of being a small enterprise bargaining with, or in, a highly organized system involving many larger enterprises.⁶

Moreover, urbanites saw cooperatives as a means of reducing the cost of food often attributed to monopoly control of production, thereby providing themselves with immediate economic benefits through lower retail prices.⁷

⁵ Saker Woeste, *The Farmers Benevolent Trust*, 233.

⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*, 86th Cong., 2nd sess., Feb. 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 42.

⁷ Robert T. Patterson, *The Tax Exemption of Cooperatives* (New York: University Publishers, 1961), 4.

Beyond simple economics, most urban Americans held particular cultural ideals and perceptions of farm people that not only led urbanites to accept farm cooperatives, but in fact to support their development. Popular cultural ideals of the early 20th century, particularly the agrarian myth, held farmers to be morally superior and well-grounded in traditional values of self-sufficiency, economy and community. Early on farm cooperatives became associated with the attributes of the agrarian myth.⁸ This concept allowed urban Americans to trust farm people with the economic power afforded them through cooperatives.

Not only that, but for the millions of urban Americans noticing the increasingly divergent living conditions and educational levels between urban and rural America, cooperatives offered the opportunity to bring farm people into the modern era. Farm people were not only innocent of potential abuse of power through cooperatives because of their moral superiority as seen through the agrarian myth, but they lacked the ability and business acumen to even try. As urban America and industry grabbed hold of systematic business practices the fact that millions of farm people still held onto old methods of production lacking any scientific basis made such growing differences all the more apparent and appalling. Many people believed that farmers lacked a grasp of new technologies and business practices and needed to be taught the new methods in order that agriculture catch up to the growing needs of urban society, namely fulfilling the need for cheap food. This assumption ran so strong that states aided in the organization of cooperatives through extension services while land grant universities began to teach

⁸ Ibid, 4.

cooperative concepts in college classes as early as the late 19th century.⁹ Adhering to this underlying belief, early in their development farmers shaped cooperatives in the image of corporations, coordinating shipments of goods to increase efficiency and developing economies of scale in purchases.¹⁰

The development of the Missouri Farmers Association (MFA) provides an excellent example not only of the early years of farm cooperative development, but of the cultural underpinnings of such development. Founded in 1917 by farmers frustrated with the high costs of farm supplies, MFA leadership played on and reinforced the agrarian myth as a way to justify its birth during World War I and continued growth through the post-World War II years. William Hirth, long-time president of the MFA and eventual editor of the organization's newsletter, *The Missouri Farmer*, took the lead in presenting these cultural arguments to the public, both farm and non-farm, through the MFA's publication. In a World War II twist on the agrarian myth, Hirth noted,

The average American farmer is as patriotic, as industrious and as self-abnegating as any citizen of any nation in the history of the world. He has been the very bone and sinew of our nation from the very beginning.¹¹

In highlighting the moral superiority of farmers, *The Missouri Farmer* went as far as to claim farmers to be more patriotic and liberty-loving than other people. "It is a well-known fact that farmers value their liberties, exercise them more freely, than many other classes of the people."¹²

⁹ Saker Woeste, *The Farmers Benevolent Trust*, 21 and Joseph G. Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise, 1920-1945* (Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1973), 220.

¹⁰ Saker Woeste, 232.

¹¹ "The Fight of Agriculture for Economic Equality," *Missouri Farmer* (June 1, 1943).

¹² "Coming Events Cast Their Shadows," *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 15, 1943).

MFA leaders, like those of other cooperatives, did not limit their arguments to the agrarian myth. Instead, they recognized the need to use economic arguments to justify cooperatives, but also to play upon popular attitudes of farmers as failing to keep up with the urban business model. Not only would cooperatives improve the cost-effectiveness of farmers by taking actions to “promote, foster, encourage, and develop the Agricultural industry among its members, by providing ways, means, and facilities for the marketing of...products in the most economical and profitable manner to its members,” but coops could also show urban Americans that farmers could catch up to modern business ideals.¹³ By implementing efficient methods of marketing, the MFA sought to place farming “upon a plane with **other** legitimate business enterprises.”¹⁴ By 1959, the MFA boasted its success of adopting modern business techniques.

To build up MFA’s gigantic marketing and supply system, the farmer members adopted ‘big business’ methods to develop steady and profitable outlets for their products, and to manufacture many of their necessary farm supplies. MFA affiliated cooperatives now operate 29 major plants and facilities to process and market their members’ products.¹⁵

MFA leadership even went so far as to call its organization an “empire.”¹⁶

Moreover, in 1941, the MFA, in cooperation with the University of Missouri, organized a three-day training course for all new employees to teach them the finer points of business operations, including public relations. MFA leaders taught their employees to

¹³ *By-Laws for the Missouri Farmers Association, Incorporated*. University of Missouri Agricultural Economics Department, file 1604, WHMC.

¹⁴ *By-Laws for the Missouri Farmers Association, Incorporated*. University of Missouri Agricultural Economics Department, file 1604, WHMC. Emphasis added. The idea of promoting farming as a business also appealed to farm people seeking to keep farm youth interested in agriculture as an occupation. This long-held concern of losing their youth to urban jobs and the idea of developing a business identity and applying business practices to agriculture as a means of keeping farm youth down on the farm can be reviewed in chapter 1.

¹⁵ “MFA Biggest Business in Missouri,” *Missouri Farmer* (May 19, 1949).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

“make the service efficient and valuable, to keep the ‘house in order,’ the record clean and all contacts pleasant.”¹⁷ The business model taught farmers to use any unique characteristic to their economic advantage. “Membership,” according to Howard Klinefelter, editor of the *Missouri Farmer*, “is an advantage an MFA Agency has over its competitors and it should be used in every way possible.”¹⁸

In seeking to apply modern business strategies to their work, cooperatives such as the MFA took the initial step toward alienating the public in the 1950s that would lead to the tax policy challenge. Furthermore, the MFA openly noted the use of patronage refunds as a means of funding future development.

Members share in the profits in proportion to the amount of business they do with a coop. These earnings, called patron’s equities, are not always immediately refunded. It is a general MFA policy to postpone payment of part of the refunds so the funds can be put back into the business as additional working capital.¹⁹

While it was acceptable for businesses to use their unique characteristics to find an advantage, there were limits to this ideal. Using a tax loophole to create an untaxed investment source seemed questionable to many people, despite the benefits farm cooperatives provided to family farmers or consumers. Businesses competing with coops made sure to remind the public of this questionable advantage.

Not only did cooperatives help integrate farmers into the dominant business model, doing so also helped farmers survive, especially in the new agricultural economy of the post-World War II era. By expanding into many business areas, the MFA and other similar cooperatives provided products and services to farmers at costs lower than

¹⁷ Paul Showergerdt, “Membership Relations and Membership Responsibilities,” In *Training Course for MFA Employees* (March 9, 1942), 2, found in the Ellis Library, University of Missouri.

¹⁸ H.E. Klinefelter, “Public Relations,” In *Training Course for MFA Employees* (March 9, 1942), 3.

¹⁹ “MFA Biggest Business in Missouri,” *Missouri Farmer* (May 19, 1949).

those provided by the competition. By 1951, the year of the federal tax policy change, the MFA not only had farm supply stores and commodity distribution centers, but also seed dealerships, a tire factory and associated dealerships, an insurance company, gasoline service stations and even an oil pipeline and refinery to capture more stages of the fuel and oil production process. MFA owned and operated stockyards in Kansas City, St. Joseph and Springfield, Missouri as well as in National Stockyards, Illinois. It even operated oil refineries in Chanute, Kansas and Memphis, Tennessee.²⁰

Cooperative leaders justified expansion into so many areas on the basis that private industry either inadequately provided such goods or failed to offer farmers reasonable prices. Such justifications for farm cooperative activity originated in the mid-1800s with banks charging usurious rates on loans and railroad companies forcing farmers to pay exorbitant rates simply because their railroad often was the only available in an area. Nationalization of railroads and bimetallism (to make loans easier to repay), after all, became major planks in the Populist Party platform in the 1890s. The justification had not changed by the post-World War II era. However, the rhetoric did change a bit as the concept of the family farm grew and competition from corporate farms increased within a new industrial structure. Coops not only forced various industries to provide goods and services at better rates to farmers, a long-held justification of coop leaders, but they now offered to family farms a means of competing with corporate farms that enjoyed lower costs resulting from volume purchasing of goods and selling of commodities. Commenting on the new economic conditions of agriculture, the Farmer Cooperative Service, a federal agency designed to aid cooperatives, noted in 1949 that, “under conditions of commercialized agriculture, farming has become more of

²⁰ Ibid.

a manufacturing business.”²¹ “Cooperative purchasing associations,” the Service continued, “are simply an extension of the farming enterprise.”²²

Within the new economic context, farmers increasingly turned to coops to improve their profit margins and thus, survive in the business of farming. Louis Heger, a farmer from Jasper, Missouri asked, “Isn’t it just good business for farmers to buy and sell together through a farmer’s cooperative?”²³ The growth of the Missouri Farmers Association in the post-war period reflects this trend. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, MFA membership stood around 40,000.²⁴ In 1942, membership had already climbed to 55,238 and by 1950 that figure had reached 130,949 and by 1954, grew even further to 155,630 members.²⁵ By 1950, over half of all Missouri farmers had memberships to the MFA, making it one of the largest state level cooperatives in the nation.²⁶ This is a particularly compelling sign of popularity considering that the number of farmers in the state began to fall with the World War II years, shrinking the potential membership pool. Moreover, as a sign of the rising economic activity of the MFA, in 1951 it became the largest business in the state, conducting a volume of business over

²¹ *News for Farmer Cooperatives*, Farmer Cooperative Service (Washington: USGPO, 1949), cited in Joseph Knapp, *Farmers in Business: Studies in Cooperative Enterprise* (Washington: American Institute of Cooperation, 1963), 47.

²² *Ibid*, 48.

²³ Louis Heger to James P. Kem, April 25, 1947, File 2786, James P. Kem Papers, WHMC.

²⁴ Lowell Dyson, *Farmers Organizations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 161.

²⁵ “MFA Membership,” *Missouri Farmer* (April 1943); “All Records Smashed,” *Missouri Farmer* (March 1951) and “We Break a Record,” *Missouri Farmer* (December 1954).

²⁶ The MFA became one of the largest state-level coops according to not only total number of members, but also according to the percentage of farmers in the state having membership. In 1954, MFA membership stood at 155,630 while total farm population for the state stood somewhere between 230,000 and 250,000. See: “We Break a Record,” *Missouri Farmer* (December 1954).

\$200,000,000 annually, more than in-state brewery giant, Budweiser.²⁷ Farm cooperative business across the nation similarly grew as the volume of business rose from \$2.3 billion in 1940 to over \$10.7 billion in 1958.²⁸ In growing so rapidly and so profoundly farm cooperatives, particularly the MFA, became a popular target for criticism from not only in-state cooperative opponents, but also of the national anti-cooperative organization known as the National Tax Equality Association (NTEA)

Meanwhile, just as the MFA and the larger cooperative movement began their considerable post-war rise in economic power and membership, other groups began to react to the realities of considerable, and still growing, cooperative competition. The NTEA organized in 1943 and became the leading anti-cooperative organization in the U.S and hence, the entity around which private and corporate business interests rallied. Initially named The League for the Protection of Private Enterprise (a name making its intentions quite obvious and thus seeming quite biased), then The Central Coordinating Group, (a name that removed the bias, but created questions of purpose), organization leadership finally settled on the National Tax Equality Association (a name that hid direct interests while appealing to the popularly held concept of fairness).²⁹

The organization was not simply based on ideological grounds, as the final name would imply. In fact, the leadership of the organization came directly from businesses facing competition from coops or from lobbying firms geared toward aiding businesses. The first president of the NTEA, Ben C. McCabe, was also the President of the International Elevator Company, a grain storage and transportation company based out of

²⁷ "MFA Biggest Business in Missouri," *Missouri Farmer* (May 19, 1949).

²⁸ Patterson, *The Tax Exemption of Cooperatives*, 6.

²⁹ Davis Douthit, *Taxes and Coops* (Chicago: National Association of Cooperatives, ND), 1.

Minneapolis, Minnesota that experienced considerable competition with the rise of the Farmers Union Grain Terminal Association and became dedicated to the task of wiping out the competition.³⁰ Vice President Vernon Scott ran the fundraising campaign for the NTEA, a role he had with the California Chamber of Commerce, a business-interest organization and strong political lobbying group.³¹ Indicating the rising competition and tensions coop growth caused with the business community, coop leaders recognized the urge private business leaders such as McCabe had to “slap those cooperatives down,” based on the “threat to their pocket books.”³²

In 1947, the Tax Equality Committee of Eastern Missouri (TECEM) formed to take the anti-farm cooperative message to the government and people of Missouri. Led by St. Louis area business owners, who like the participants of the NTEA became concerned with the new competition presented by farm cooperatives, TECEM called on all private business owners to contribute to their collective cause.³³ Not much beyond their simple existence, however, can be gleaned from the historical record. For the most part the organization lived a quiet life and acted mostly as a local funds and awareness raiser for the larger National Tax Equality Association which took the lead in negative attacks on coops. Lower level organizations such as the Tax Equality Committee of Eastern Missouri, for the most part, had to maintain better public relations out of concern of association with vicious attacks. Customers, after all, would more readily respond

³⁰ Wesley McCune, *Who's Behind Our Farm Policy?* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 120.

³¹ Douthit, *Taxes and Coops*, 2.

³² *Ibid*, 3.

³³ F. V. Heinkel, “Tell Him!, Tell Him!, Tell Him!,” *Missouri Farmer* (April 15, 1947).

negatively to local businesses for any negative behavior than they would to similar actions by more seemingly distant corporations.

The heart of the issue involved the tax-exempt status of coop patronage dividends which, until farming and coops blossomed into considerable entities in the post-war period, had not been an issue for competing corporations. However, when coops such as the MFA held onto annual patronage dividends to use as a source of capital for expansion, private business could no longer ignore the fact that farm customers increasingly turned to coops.³⁴ A comment by Martin Schirber, a Missouri resident, provides an illustrative example of the new attitude many people held toward cooperatives in light of the new economics of agriculture.

When the business of farmer-owned cooperatives leaps thirty per cent in one year to a total of three and three-quarter billions, and when membership increases in the same period by a quarter of a million, the competition of 'farmers' elevators and of GREASY little co-op oil stations begins to take on a different cast.³⁵

In some cases, privately-owned businesses reduced their profit margins in order to stay competitive with coops offering the same products or services in an area. However, many such businesses did not like the idea of reducing profits to maintain market share. With that the case, the Federal tax policy toward coops became the primary means through which privately-owned businesses could confront, limit, and perhaps reduce the

³⁴ In the post-war years, the MFA made it a policy of holding onto annual patronage dividends for usually five to seven years before actually returning such dividends to the members. In doing so, they could use that money to fund expansion projects when once operating, would produce profit that could be used to pay off the dividends.

³⁵ Martin Schirber, "Rochdale and Taxes," *Missouri Farmer* (Dec. 15, 1944), 8.

competition coming from coops.³⁶ They would use Cold War rhetoric and normative arguments of fairness in their endeavor.

Thoroughly frustrated with the rising competition from coops, privately-owned businesses and their organizations such as the NTEA formulated policy recommendations geared toward reducing coops' profit margin. To do so, the NTEA called on the Federal government to apply all taxes to coops and members receiving dividends that applied to corporations and shareholders receiving profits. In a statement to the House Ways and Means Committee during hearings on Federal tax policy toward cooperative earnings in 1960, Garner M. Lester, President of the National Tax Equality Association contended:

It is the position of National Tax Equality Association now, as it always has been, that tax equality can be achieved only by the imposition of a corporate tax at full rates on all earnings of cooperatives before distribution, followed by imposition of the individual income tax on patronage dividends received by co-op members.³⁷

The NTEA leadership not only believed they could challenge the long-established tax exemption of coops, but that this had become the avenue with the most potential for results. Likewise, members of the Civic Association of America, a business lobbying group similar to the NTEA, concluded that “[Cooperatives] must be forced to pay the same taxes as other businesses.”³⁸ These beliefs seemed reasonable to business advocates seeing the changes in agriculture that made farms and their coops considerably more business-oriented than at the turn of the 20th century.

³⁶ Other means through which privately-owned businesses attacked cooperative competition will be discussed later in this chapter.

³⁷ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*, 86th Cong., 2nd sess., February 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 115.

³⁸ “Co-op Hearings at Seattle,” *United Business Facts: Independents' Voice of Progress* 12 (Oct. 15, 1947), found in File 2792, James P. Kem Papers, WHMC.

Moreover, the appeal for equality of treatment through taxes worked politically and garnered popular support. Coops could partly blame themselves for the fact that for-profit business owners viewed coops as equals. Not only had coops grown to become considerable market competition to profit-oriented entities, but coop organizers, after all, pushed the idea that coops and farmers represented legitimate businesses, equal to all other businesses. Coops often mimicked corporate strategies and techniques in their quest to reduce costs and improve efficiency, increasing their similarity with privately-owned businesses. The MFA proudly noted that “members adopted ‘big business’ methods to develop steady and profitable outlets for their products, and to manufacture many of their necessary farm supplies.”³⁹

Cooperatives responded to the NTEA tax policy change proposal by outlining the differences between coops and for-profit business as well as between patronage dividends and shareholder profits. The MFA, through advertisements, speaking engagements and its newsletter, *The Missouri Farmer*, provided the cooperative side an ample platform from which it could remind Missourians of how coops were different from businesses and thus, still deserving of a unique tax code. Key to the MFA effort was getting farm membership to take the co-op message to non-farmers and policy leaders. By relying on grassroots organizing, the MFA could attempt to sway public opinion in ways that the NTEA could not. Central to this message, the MFA differentiated co-ops from privately-held businesses. In one article, MFA President Fred Heinkel noted that “Farmers did not establish cooperatives to make a profit **off** somebody else, as ‘old line businesses do.’”⁴⁰

³⁹ “MFA Biggest Business in Missouri,” *Missouri Farmer* (May 19, 1949).

⁴⁰ Fred Heinkel, “Farmers Have a Right to Form Cooperatives,” *Missouri Farmer* (August, 1950). Emphasis in text.

While differentiating between business structures, Heinkel incidentally managed to reinforce the idea that farmers were business owners. “The farmer through his cooperative is simply handling his OWN business.”⁴¹

MFA leaders seeking to further distinguish coops did so by denoting that patronage refunds were simply a tool through which coops could return overcharges to customers. To make this point, and perhaps to poke its finger in the eye of its for-profit competition, the MFA emphasized “the long established rights of cooperative corporations, and of profit business corporations also, to make, ‘tax free to the corporations,’ return of overcharges to patrons.”⁴² Coop leaders had long replied to charges of tax inequality that any business, for-profit or otherwise, could reduce its tax load by returning to customers any overcharges. Wright Patman, Democratic Congressman from Texas, initiated an investigation by the House Small Business Committee, of which Patman was chair, to determine any advantages available only to coops. Patman’s investigation concluded that cooperatives had no privileges or advantages not available to all other types of business.”⁴³ It just so happened that only coops took advantage of that aspect of the tax law.

While the subject of the debate centered on taxes, the arguments often became a matter of debating what values the nation ought to support. In particular, what values the nation should support in the midst of an agricultural revolution. Both sides of the tax debate used family farm rhetoric as a means of gaining support from the general public as

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Court Upholds Cooperative Right to Pay Patronage Savings Returns,” *Missouri Farmer* (Nov. 15, 1944), 5.

⁴³ “Doubts Feasibility of Farm Co-op Tax,” *New York Times* (Nov. 1, 1947).

well as from political officials.⁴⁴ The NTEA often argued that large coops such as the MFA were not part of family farms and therefore, did not deserve special consideration. The group also began to call into question, ever so delicately and diplomatically, the idea that farm people, especially those within a particular scale of farming, held any uniqueness in American society. The MFA, meanwhile used family farm rhetoric and the call to save the family farm, a particular scale of agriculture, to justify their special tax treatment and expansion of co-op operations.

Moreover, the Cold War atmosphere provided another locus for debate as the NTEA used the hard line against anything that depended on collective action, even if having capitalistic goals. The MFA and farm cooperatives used the Cold War as a situation to further argue their role in fighting against the problems that made people turn to communism, namely unfair market situations or the lack of opportunity to compete on a level playing field. Adding to the rhetoric was the fact that the debate occurred in tax policy, an area in which fairness and equality were highly valued by all, even if such values were more normative than objective. As a result, both sides again played to this particular language in arguing their case to the public and political officials.

The Cold War came to have a profound impact on the tax policy debate surrounding farm cooperatives. Heightened by fears of real or simply perceived threats, the increased awareness of every American to internal threats of communism made it

⁴⁴ While it is difficult to determine who exactly heard or listened to the messages of the NTEA and the MFA, what is important is the way in which these organizations used particular ideals and values in order to gain the support of political officials and the general public. The fact that these groups argued in terms of “the family farm,” “communism” or “fairness” denotes that these ideas were important to any intended audience.

useful rhetoric for anyone seeking to damage an opponent's image.⁴⁵ In the case of farm cooperatives, the job of red baiting and associating coops with communism was a relatively easy task for the NTEA since collective action, rather than individual profit motive, provided the main impetus for coops. One Cold War hardliner, Congressman Paul Shafer, from Michigan, acted as an ally to business interests opposed to coops by charging coops with Communist association.

It can hardly be denied that this movement (cooperatives), carried to its logical conclusions, would play right into the hands of the Communists. And not even the co-op leaders themselves will maintain that the Communists do not support and propagandize for co-ops at every opportunity. There *are* known Communists who hold important positions in national cooperative associations.⁴⁶

The idea of a Communist threat within the cooperative movement resonated with many Americans, but particularly with those who already opposed coops. Members of this group did not question cooperative ties to communism since such accusations fit well with their previously held notions about coops. Further, it gave them another justification for their opposition. R.C. Davis, a prominent cotton and grain company owner from southern Missouri provides an example. Davis had an obvious interest in lobbying for higher taxes on coops and their members. The rapid growth of the MFA in the post-war years created stiff competition for farmers' products. For him, the Communistic charge against coops provided one more reason for the federal government to do everything possible to rid the nation of them. In fact, he took on conspiratorial a tone, claiming that post-war growth of coops "is the policy of the communist [sic] sponsored under ground

⁴⁵ One example of the power of charges of socialism in defeating an opponent is the American Medical Association's use of that language to destroy President Truman's attempt at a universal health care program. The use of Communist charges is not limited to the Cold War era. One hangover from that period is continued "traction" that charges of communism or socialism still garner, well into the post-Cold War era.

⁴⁶ Paul W. Shafer, "Co-op Tax Exemption: A Threat to Free Enterprise," *Public Utilities Fortnightly* 40 (5 Aug 1947), found in File 2782, James P. Kem Papers, WHMC. Emphasis in text.

[sic] by Russia” that would lead America “to a place of economic ruin.”⁴⁷ Anti-cooperative groups, in their effort to turn public opinion against coops, charged coops with not only holding Communist ties, but of threatening the very nature and existence of the economy and American government. Congressman Shafer again provided the charge. “Tax-exempt cooperatives today represent a threat to the solvency of our government, to our system of free enterprise, and, indeed, to our whole future as a representative republic.”⁴⁸

The atmosphere of the Cold War became so burdened with anti-Communitistic sentiment that critics did not even have to make a direct charge of communistic ties to inflict damage. Rather, attacks could imply impropriety on the part of cooperatives without actually claiming they committed illegal or even unethical actions. While charges of communism were effective in stirring public hatred for the targeted opponent, such charges also had their downside. The targets could sometimes vindicate themselves by providing proof they had no Communist connections. In this case the false accusations could reduce the accuser’s credibility. Most often groups such as farm cooperatives learned the best defense was a solid offense of their own brand of anti-communism.

As the Cold War continued, the public took less seriously charges of Communistic ties. Senator Joseph McCarthy’s accusations during the early 1950s, while succeeding in playing on people’s fears, nonetheless resulted in people raising the standard for Communistic accusations. The nationally televised Army-McCarthy

⁴⁷ R.C. Davis to Paul Jones (June 23, 1949). Found in Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

⁴⁸ Paul Shafer, “Co-op Tax Exemption,” *Public Utilities Fortnightly* (5 Aug 1947), found in File 2782, James P. Kem Papers, WHMC.

hearings of 1954 proved the beginning of the end for McCarthy as his barrage of unguided accusations resulted in public scorn of at least unfounded anti-Communist accusations. For those opposed to coops, this meant finding either solid evidence of Communist association, which rarely happened, or finding a way to imply impropriety without actually making charges of communism, which became the preferred route. O.E. Rauh, owner of Boman Milling Company of Pocahontas, Missouri argued, “Tax exemptions and favoritisms to Co-ops [sic] and other commercial organizations have become a threat to our National Economy [sic] and our American way of life, for which we fought in two wars.”⁴⁹

Clearly, farm cooperatives had to address the various charges of anti-Communist subversion and of anti-American behavior if they were to maintain their economic position or win the tax policy debate. Within the context of the Cold War addressing these charges was unavoidable. To do so the MFA relied on the agrarian myth. MFA president Fred Heinkel could not help but comment, however, on how the Cold War atmosphere had created the perfect, yet artificial means through which the NTEA attacked farm cooperatives.

The enemies of farmer cooperatives have certainly used the present world calamity to press their insidious campaign of deceit and hate. For them, the new world peril is being used as a made-to-order propaganda weapon.⁵⁰

Despite the “artificial” basis for attacks, coops still had to confront them, especially when the attacks proved quite effective in slowly turning the public and policy leaders against cooperatives. In its specific in-state battle, the Tax Equality Committee of Eastern Missouri, aided by NTEA attacks on the MFA, had hammered away at public

⁴⁹ O.E. Rauh to Paul C. Jones, July 7, 1949, File 2529, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

⁵⁰ “Statement by F. V. Heinkel,” *Missouri Farmer* (March 1, 1951).

support for the Missouri Farmers Association through charges of Communist association and unfair competition. The MFA became quite aware of this fact when, in 1947, in speaking about the upcoming annual convention, Howard Klinefelter, *Missouri Farmer* editor, noted, “Never in the MFA’s history has a darker cloud hung over an Annual Convention than that which hangs over the one we shall hold this month.”⁵¹

To respond to Communist or anti-free enterprise charges, MFA leaders relied on the agrarian myth as well as a more inclusive definition of open competition within a free enterprise system. MFA president Fred Heinkel took on Communist charges from the NTEA.

If NTEA and the other enemies of farmers are telling the truth, more than 200,000 Missouri farmers and their families are communists, tax dodgers, and un-American. I think you will agree that the 200,000 farm families in this state and, indeed, the four million of them throughout America who own cooperatives, are the backbone of the Republic.⁵²

Moreover, farmers’ support and sacrifice to fulfill a special need during World War II provided further proof that farmers held unquestionable support for the nation.

They have never failed to adequately feed the American people, and during the recent war they fed America better than ever before, in addition to feeding the allied armies; nor have they ever been lacking when it comes to giving up their sons to fight the Nations’ wars.⁵³

Again, the concept of an agrarian myth in which farm people contributed more to the nation than others provided some defense against charges of Communist involvement.⁵⁴

⁵¹ H.E. Klinefelter, “Next Month the Fireworks Will Start,” *Missouri Farmer* (August 15, 1947).

⁵² F.V. Heinkel to Governor Philip M. Donnelly, July 3, 1948, File 359, Philip M. Donnelly Papers, WHMC.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ An exact or quantifiable measurement of the success of various attacks and defenses would be impossible to create. As with much of this tax policy argument little evidence exists of exact numbers of support or opposition to coops or explanation. Instead, this study relies on a general sense taken from the events and

Finally, the fact that farm people owned their own farms meant they were not rural versions of industrial laborers who could fall prey to Communist ideology. Rather, their considerable monetary commitment, often a farm family placed its entire fortune within the farm, meant they had extra incentive to see that communism did not take root in America. “Isn’t it a bit far fetched,” Howard Klinefelter rhetorically asked, “for any one to charge that we would have any truck with Communism?”⁵⁵ Klinefelter answered his own rhetorical question to be certain everyone clearly understood that farmers, and hence their cooperatives, stood strong against communism. “No other class of the American people have a greater stake in the free enterprise system.”⁵⁶ Cooperatives, the MFA concluded, helped farmers “to hang on to their stake in the free enterprise system.”⁵⁷ In drawing comparative distinction to farm people, Klinefelter again relied on the latent theme of an agrarian myth. To solidify cooperatives’ status as a truly American institution one cooperative organizer argued they were “as American as barn-raising and hot dogs.”⁵⁸

Cooperative leaders such as Howard Klinefelter and Fred Heinkel of the MFA provided astute defense against charges of Communist ties. However, that did not necessarily provide a defense against the NTEA charge that coops challenged the free enterprise system. To address these attacks, cooperative leaders across the United States

existing public record to determine popular attitudes regarding cooperatives, the NTEA and their various arguments. In essence, the argument presented is one based considerably on qualitative analysis as opposed to quantitative.

⁵⁵ H.E. Klinefelter, “Answers to Some False Charges of the NTEA,” *Missouri Farmer* (April 15, 1947).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Statement by the Missouri Farmer [sic] Association, Inc., Columbia, MO, Before the House Ways and Means Committee, Washington, D.C.: Feb. 23, 1950, found in File 2531, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

⁵⁸ Douthit, *Taxes and Co-ops*, 18.

played upon the democratic nature of coops as proof of their support for the American institution of free enterprise. Jerry Voorhis, California Congressman and eventual Executive Director of the Cooperative League of the United States of America, contributed to the MFA campaign to defend cooperatives with an article published in the *Missouri Farmer*. “Cooperatives are true democracy in the practical field of economic life because each member has one vote whether his financial contribution be large or small,” Voorhis noted. “If we believe in democracy sincerely we just have to believe in cooperatives.”⁵⁹ Granted, this argument did not directly address cooperative support for free enterprise. Instead, it relied on a blurring of support for one American institution, democracy, for another, free enterprise.

Cooperative leaders found another way of defending against the charge that coops did not fit into the free enterprise system. By focusing on the purpose of coops to improve the competitive ability of a group of members within the free enterprise system coop leaders could easily defend coops using the popular values of individualism and a strong work ethic. Coop organizers interpreted the NTEA attack on tax deductions for patronage returns as an attack on the ethic of individual work.

[The NTEA] is saying that all business ought to be done for profit. It is saying that you must sell your grain and buy your gasoline through a profit business. It is saying you have no right to paint your own home, mow your own lawn or produce your own food.⁶⁰

In framing the debate this way, coops managed to incite anger toward the NTEA from farm families such as the Kulmans who farmed near Golden City, Missouri. “As far as I and my family are concerned,” A.H. Kulman wrote, “[the NTEA] are a double crossing

⁵⁹ Jerry Voorhis, “The Constructive Work of Cooperatives,” *Missouri Farmer* (Dec. 15, 1945).

⁶⁰ Douthit, *Taxes and Co-ops*, 8.

selfish group who are trying to get us under their feet and stamp us into the mud.”⁶¹ The Kulmans concluded, “Their slogan should be called just what it is, National Swine.”⁶²

Adding another line of attack, MFA President Fred Heinkel argued for a broader definition of free enterprise than that advocated by for-profit businesses.

What is free enterprise, anyhow? We of the cooperative movement interpret it as freedom to develop cooperatives in the future as in the past, in a free, competitive society. But some big businessmen, we suspect, interpret it as freedom to pay as little as possible for raw materials and labor, charge as much as possible for the finished products, keep as much profits as possible, and pay as little taxes as possible.⁶³

An advertisement in *Cooperative Digest* entitled “Competitive Free Enterprise Made America,” suggested that “the Mutual or Cooperative Technique is a Part of the American Way.”⁶⁴ The ad noted that farmers were not the only business people operating coops, highlighting the hypocrisy of the NTEA attack on farm coops. “Railroads, on a mutual basis operate the Railway Express Agency,” while “small merchants, grocers, jewelers, shoe stores, etc. mutually operate wholesale buying agencies.”⁶⁵ An investigation by the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives found that:

About 10,000 druggists, nearly 1,000 hardware dealers, and 1,000 members of the bakery trade have formed cooperative organizations. Cooperative principles have found widespread application...not only in agriculture, but in our whole economy.⁶⁶

⁶¹ A.H. Kulman, Mrs. A.H. Kulman and Ray G. Kulman to James P. Kem, April 25, 1947, File 2787, James P. Kem Papers, WHMC.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ F.V. Heinkel, “Is Big Business Frightened?,” *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 15, 1944).

⁶⁴ “Competitive Free Enterprise Made America,” Advertisement in *Cooperative Digest* (November 15, 1952), found in File 1874, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Business Groups Use Cooperative Methods,” *Missouri Farmer* (May 15, 1946).

The House Small Business Committee, led by Congressman Patman, concurred. “There is substantial evidence to indicate that most vocal opponents of cooperatives are themselves members of cooperatives and their firms engage as members in cooperative enterprises.”⁶⁷ This fact made the NTEA barrage appear less a matter of principle and almost entirely a matter of economic self-interest. “What is really motivating this crowd,” noted Howard Klinefelter, “is that they don’t like cooperative competition and want to put us out of business by taxing cooperatives double.”⁶⁸ Klinefelter saw the writing on the wall. He noted, “These enemies of farmer cooperatives well recognize that the power to tax includes the power to destroy.”⁶⁹

If anti-cooperative businesses could use Cold War rhetoric to go on the attack, farm cooperatives, however, had their own rhetorical tool with which to fight back in the battle to sway popular opinion toward their favor. The family farm and especially the idea of saving the family farm became powerful rhetorical devices for cooperative leaders seeking to give their organizations moral authority and thus, justification for a unique federal tax structure. The growth of collective farms in the Soviet Union provided an international threat to family farms while domestically, the growth of corporate farming posed a more realistic and tangible threat. In this situation, coops could place themselves as the savior of the family farm. However, to make the connection between coops and the family farm, as well as to show how coops differentiated from for-profit businesses, cooperative leaders such as Fred Heinkel had to cultivate the image of coops as simply

⁶⁷ “Businessmen ‘Snipe’ at Us,” *Missouri Farmer* (June 15, 1946).

⁶⁸ H.E. Klinefelter, *An Inside View on Legislation*, February 19, 1951, File 41, H.E. Klinefelter Papers, WHMC.

⁶⁹ Press Release, “Statement by F.V. Heinkel, President of the Missouri Farmers Association, March 1, 1951, File 11885, O.R. Johnson Papers, WHMC.

extensions of farms rather than separate entities. So not only did coops not “make a profit off somebody else, as ‘old line’ businesses do,” noted Heinkel, “The farmer through his cooperative is simply handling his OWN business.”⁷⁰

More importantly, coops provided family farms the means to survive the tighter profit margins of an increasingly mechanized and integrated agricultural economy. The cost-price squeeze and increased competition from corporate farming, Klinefelter noted, “were about to destroy family type agriculture as we knew it in America.”⁷¹ By the late 1940s, the unstated primary policy goal of the federal government became not simply saving agriculture, and hence the entire economy, from wild fluctuations in markets, or improving the standard of living of farm people, as both were the case in the 1930s, but to save the family farm specifically from increased competition from large corporate farms or the overriding cost-price squeeze that came to define agriculture in the post-war era.⁷² John C. Baker, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Agriculture under President Lyndon Johnson, noted that aiding cooperatives “can help to preserve and maintain the family farm.”⁷³ Coop leaders, in their battle with the NTEA, had to draw on the moral authority of smaller family farms, for which coops operated. Fred Heinkel made perhaps the best case for coops using the situation of the family farm in the post-war context when he argued:

⁷⁰ F.V. Heinkel, “Farmers Have a Right to Form Cooperatives,” *Missouri Farmer* (August 1950).

⁷¹ Statement by the Missouri Farmer [sic] Association, Inc., Columbia, MO, Before the House Ways and Means Committee, at Washington, D.C. February 23, 1950, File 2531, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

⁷² Chapters 4 and 5 will examine specifically how this became the underlying federal agricultural policy in both Democratic and Republican administrations as well as the different policy options implemented for similar ends.

⁷³ John A. Baker, Assistant Secretary of the USDA to Paul C. Jones, August 11, 1964, File 2545, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

The establishment of farmer cooperatives in the United States has been and will in the future continue to be the resounding answer to either the ‘land barons’ or corporate agriculture, or an agriculture of Russian collectivism.⁷⁴

And if coops stood as one of the best means of saving the family farm, any attacks upon coops, in essence, became an attack on the family farm. John H. Davis, Executive Secretary of the National Council of Farm Cooperatives made the connection. “Since the small family farm is a bulwark of our free enterprise system,” Davis noted, “the proposal [to increase taxes on coops] strikes at the very heart of this system by weighing the scales against the family farm in competition with larger units.”⁷⁵

Davis’s statement proves useful not only for understanding the rhetorical use of the family farm within the coop tax battle, but also for digging into issues of fairness that surround all tax policy debate. When it comes to taxes people hold quite different definitions of what is fair. The normative nature of fairness contradicts the general assumption that fairness can be achieved objectively, making the debate all the more difficult and confrontational. Within this tax policy debate individuals’ definitions of fairness and the use of fairness as a rhetorical tool, much like Cold War anti-communism and the idea of saving the family farm, played a vital role. Both sides attempted to convince the public and policy leaders that their stated position held a more balanced approach to the competing interests, and therefore was “fairer” than the proposals of their opponents.

From the perspective of businesses and corporations competing with growing farm coops for the business of farm people, the different tax structure applied to coops

⁷⁴ “Statement by F.V. Heinkel, President of the Missouri Farmers Association, March 1, 1951, File 11885, O.R. Johnson Papers, WHMC.

⁷⁵ “Co-op Convention Attacks Tax Plan,” *New York Times* (Aug. 31, 1951).

seemed quite unfair. In Congressional hearings on the tax treatment of coops, Lawrence A. Colman, General Counsel to the Allied Chemical Corporation testified:

The tax posture which permits a farm cooperative to escape taxation on the profits it makes when engaged in a business competitive with us, means that we are playing the great game of American business under rules which arbitrarily and discriminatorily favor one side and hurt the other.⁷⁶

In the same hearing, the MFA came up as a specific example of the unfairness resulting from coops not having to pay taxes on patronage. W. R. Ashburn, President of the Norfolk, Virginia based Smith-Douglas Company, producer of fertilizers and feed supplements, identified the MFA as an abuser of their coop status.

I do not know how large one must be to become an industrial giant. I do know that the Missouri Farmers Association owns a high-analysis fertilizer plant at Joplin, Mo, completed approximately 3 years ago at costs said to be \$5 million, all of which money came from the tax advantage which had been accorded that association, and while that plant is approximately 800 miles from a deep-water seaport, its tax advantage enables the company to compete in the export market at lower prices than proprietary companies can offer with any margin of profit.⁷⁷

For many on this side of the argument, it was not just that coops like the MFA had what appeared as a tax advantage over their competition. Instead it was the different tax policy coupled with the fact that coops had grown so rapidly in the post-war era and expanded into so many areas. H.G. Simpson, President of the Simpson Oil Company of Charleston, Missouri concluded that cooperatives like the MFA “have strayed far afield [sic] from just selling stuff and helping the farmer.”⁷⁸ To Simpson and many others, the growth of farm coops represented an unfair expansion beyond the intended purpose of the Capper-Volstead Act that aimed to give farmers the ability to deal with market abuses in

⁷⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 212.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 304-6.

⁷⁸ H.G. Simpson to Paul C. Jones, April 25, 1953, File 2537, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

farm product shipping and other market transactions directly related to farming. The MFA, like many other coops in the post-war era, had expanded into many areas such as insurance and oil refining that had more distant ties to farm-related market transactions.

When cooperative growth combined with the tax-exempt status of patronage dividends provided coops with a considerable competitive advantage some in Missouri worried the MFA had become anti-competitive. “What happens when the state of Missouri is so dominated by cooperative monopolies that they cannot be suppressed?” asked Loretta Phelps of Advance, Missouri.⁷⁹ Phelps, having no observable business interest in the tax policy battle, provides a powerful example of the impact fairness rhetoric could have on shaping the attitudes of observers. To her the growth and potential monopoly of the MFA not only was not worth the lower prices they could offer their customers, but in fact, had to be prevented for the sake of fairness in the economy. This attitude developed most likely as a result of reading information from the NTEA. “Having read the June issue of the National Tax Equality Association Bulletin,” Phelps declared, “I am more aware of what a frightening and unfair organization [the MFA] are.”⁸⁰

In fact, the NTEA made fairness, and not just Cold War anti-communism, a major part of its message. In an undated mass publication, the NTEA tells the story of the Moore family, owners of an Ohio furniture store, who supposedly received threats from a nearby coop after they refused to sell out. According to the NTEA, “the Big Tax-exempt

⁷⁹ Loretta Phelps to Paul C. Jones, July 8, 1964, File 2545, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

co-op came along and said- ‘sell out or we’ll open up across the street’.”⁸¹ Whether or not the coop in question actually made this threat is unclear. Either way, the NTEA made fairness an issue by concluding, “Tax favoritism enables the coops to threaten them with ‘sell out or we’ll run you out because of our tax advantages’.”⁸²

Fairness became a rhetorical tool for the NTEA and other anti-cooperative groups not only within market competition in which one competitor would have an advantage over another, but also on a macro scale where the tax exemption of one taxpayer meant supposed higher taxes for all other taxpayers. As Representative Paul Shafer of Michigan concluded, “The growth of cooperatives already is causing a heavier burden of taxation to fall on private, taxpaying businesses and individuals.”⁸³ Paul Moore, owner of Moore Motor Company of Charleston, Missouri, wrote his Congressman to complain. “The more that co-operatives are formed and are permitted to operate in competition with me- tax exempt, the higher I expect my tax to go, or can go, until I throw in the towel.”⁸⁴

Cooperative leaders made a weak attempt to challenge this assumption, either because their response was complicated or because they relied more heavily on other arguments and forms of rhetoric to make their case. Davis Douthit, a cooperative supporter, admitted that if coops increased their business then taxes would rise for other people. He noted however, that this would merely represent a shift in costs from having to pay profits to corporations, who then pay taxes, to paying taxes directly. For him,

⁸¹ Mass publication by the NTEA, undated, found in File 2528, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Paul Shafer, “Co-op Tax Exemption,” *Public Utilities Fortnightly* (August 5, 1947), found in File 2782, James C. Kem Papers, WHMC.

⁸⁴ Paul H. Moore to Paul C. Jones, July 20, 1949, File 2529, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC.

switching to coops made sense even if it raised taxes because doing so would only cut out the corporate middle man and, in the process, “reduce people’s costs.”⁸⁵

A similarly weak response by coops to the tax inequality rhetoric involved a “we’re not the only ones” argument. After all, coops had to justify a continuation of the tax exemption status of patronage returns, a more difficult argument to make than simply saying that others had similar, albeit unfair tax advantages. Such an approach would only further justify ending tax exemption of patronage, among all other tax loopholes.

Nonetheless, coop leaders could not help but point out the blatant hypocrisy of corporate leaders screaming over coop tax exemptions and calling for tax equality when they had their own tax loopholes. MFA President Fred Heinkel pointed out the double standard.

I think that you will recognize that these people who have been doing all this howling about tax equality are not in the least interested in so-called tax equality. Certainly we have heard no work about tax equality in relation to the percentage depletion allowance for those corporations and investors who mine our natural resources of oil, gas, clay, limestone, and other minerals.⁸⁶

Corporations increasingly used excessive depreciation, shifting assets to tax-exempt foundations formed as tax shelters and illegally defining expansion costs as standard operation costs all to reduce or avoid taxes.⁸⁷ In blatant disregard for the very tax equality that the NTEA had so rigorously called for, leaders defined the organization as an education and research group rather than as a lobby organization. Doing so allowed business contributors to deduct contributions to the NTEA from their taxable income.

The NTEA’s tax exempt status did not go unnoticed by coop supporters.

⁸⁵ Davis Douthit, *Taxes and Coops* (Chicago: National Association of Cooperatives, nd), 14.

⁸⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*,” 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 251.

⁸⁷ “Tax Revenue is R-I-S-I-N-G With the Help of Cooperatives...” Pamphlet Produced by the Consumers Cooperative Association, Kansas City, MO, (no date), found in File 2091, O.R. Johnson Papers, WHMC.

The NTEA that is shedding propaganda crocodile tears over alleged lost revenue has aided and abetted their contributors to escape taxation. What unadulterated hypocrisy in the light of the fact that NTEA is tax exempt.⁸⁸

Shying away from such arguments in debating the fairness of tax exemptions for patronage returns, coop leaders instead fell back on family farm rhetoric and how changing the tax law would in fact, prove unfair to family farmers. Not only did family farms face growing competition from corporate farms throughout the post-war period, but they also experienced the cost-price squeeze. With farm prices continuing their long decline and net per capita farm income still trailing that of non-farmers, forcing family farmers to pay more taxes would not be fair when looking at the larger picture. “This is not a good time,” the MFA noted in testimony, “to entertain thoughts about further aggravating the farmer’s plight by yielding to the pressure of his enemies who seek to destroy farmer-owned cooperatives.”⁸⁹

After years of wrangling over the federal tax exemption of coop patronage returns, the Internal Revenue Service, as a result of the Revenue Act of 1951, created a new tax code focused solely on coops. In what one could interpret as a victory for the National Tax Equality Association and its allies, the Revenue Act of 1951, for the first time since farm coops were allowed to operate under the Capper-Volstead Act and return savings as tax exempt patronage to farmers, taxed patronage returns not immediately

⁸⁸ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *National Tax Equality Association*, 82d Cong., 1st Sess., March 20, 1951, (Washington: USGPO, 1951), 1.

⁸⁹ Statement by the Missouri Farmer [sic] Association, Inc., Columbia, MO, Before the House Ways and Means Committee, February 23, 1950, found in File 2531, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC. In a further attempt to define the normative concept of fairness, the MFA applied such rhetoric to a previously covered argument, that of different purposes between coops and for-profit businesses. “By virtue of the tax exemption statute the farmer cooperative has a purpose and object totally different from that of the income tax paying business, and therefore as a matter of equity and fairness the same tax law should not apply to both in like manner.” Emphasis in text.

returned to farmers.⁹⁰ The Revenue Act of 1951 further required coops to pay the corporate tax rate on any patronage not immediately returned to farmers even though the patronage, under previous law, was considered savings of the farmer, rather than income for either the farmer or the coop.⁹¹

This tax policy change considerably altered the way in which farm coops conducted their business. No longer could they hold onto nine or ten years of patronage to develop a revolving fund without seeing a tax bill. Under the 1951 law, farmers had to report patronage, either returned as cash or as store credit, as taxable income. Moreover, coops had to report withheld patronage as income taxable at the much higher corporate rate. The law could not have been written any better for businesses competing with coops had they written it themselves. The new tax structure forced coops to unload as much revolving funds as possible in order to avoid heavy taxes. In doing so, however, they lost a source of funding vital to operating and expanding cooperatives. Meanwhile, in taxing farmers on patronage returns in either cash or store credit form, the 1951 Revenue Act sent the message that patronizing coops would involve troublesome red tape that more than offset any potential cost-savings.

Completely frustrated at the legal inconsistencies or “rank discrimination” of the new tax law, coop leaders protested. Jerry Voorhis, Executive Director of the Cooperative League of the USA, showed his exasperation at the corporate tax rate now applied to patronage still in coop hands.

⁹⁰ A.D. Sappington, “MFA Attorney Explains Income Tax on Patronage Refunds under Federal Revenue Act of 1951,” *Missouri Farmer* (Jan. 1953), 8.

⁹¹ Readers may recall mentioned earlier in the chapter that coops would hold onto patronage returns for a number of years to provide both operating liquid assets as well as a source of funding for expansion projects, also known as the revolving fund method. Under IRS code 101 section 12, coops did not have to pay taxes on patronage since it was considered savings or money not spent, rather than actual income of either the farmer or the coop.

A business that loses money is not taxed as if it had made a profit. Neither should a business which chooses to be a nonprofit business be taxed upon money which might have been income if it had kept and owned it but which in fact it could not legally keep and which it had never owned.⁹²

Voorhis continued his indignation with the new law, especially since it now taxed farmers' savings as if it were income.

If a woman spends \$13.99 on a dress marked down from \$19.99 she does not report \$6 of income on her income-tax return. Coop patronage refunds do not create income, they simply reduce the cost of living.⁹³

This concept, after all, had provided the main purpose of cooperatives, to reduce farmers' costs and allow them to keep more money in their pockets.

Farm coops experienced another setback with revisions to the 1954 Internal Revenue Service Tax Codes. Under Subchapter T-Tax Treatment of Patronage Allocations, a subchapter created solely for the purpose of taxing coops, Section 1391 required cash patronage returns to be taxed to the farmer. Moreover, the section required coops to pay taxes on patronage held over three years, all the while they had to pay at least four percent interest on any withheld patronage.⁹⁴ This revision effectively destroyed any advantage coops may have had over their for-profit competitors.

Farmers and farm cooperatives did not simply roll over with the passage of the Revenue Act. Various coops and individual farmers took legal recourse in response to this legislative affront. These cases took years to settle, all the while the rhetoric of fairness, family farms, and anti-communism continued, even on the part of the NTEA despite having succeeded in changing the tax law. They had little need to pursue the

⁹² Jerry Voorhis, "Cooperatives and Taxes—Coops Pay Their Taxes, the Same as Anybody Else," (publication and date unknown), found in File 1875, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 2-3.

public battle with farmers and their coops now that they had succeeded in changing federal tax policy toward coops. They realized they may have won the battle, but the war continued. In 1954, the NTEA produced a film called “Citizen Dave Douglas.” In the film, Dave just paid his income taxes, but becomes enraged when someone tells him his taxes are high because coops do not pay taxes.⁹⁵ The NTEA continued its attempts to shape public opinion and place in everyone’s minds the idea that coops did not pay taxes, even if the 1951 Revenue Act said otherwise. Finally, in 1957, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court, in the case of Long Poultry Farms, Inc. v. Commissioner, found illegal the 1951 Revenue Act, specifically Tax Code 101, section 12, relating to taxation of coop patronage. The court determined that the government could not tax patronage returns in the form of store credit as a form of income since such noncash patronage refunds had no market value, nor did they represent real income.⁹⁶ Following the court decision, the Department of Revenue decided on February 14, 1958, perhaps in a Valentine’s Day gesture, that they would no longer attempt to assess an income tax on patrons for noncash patronage refunds (in-store credit) having no market value.⁹⁷ This still left in place, however, the tax on patronage returned as cash as well as the tax on patronage held by coops.

The tax policy battle still had not reached its conclusion, however. In 1959, Representative Richard M. Simpson of Pennsylvania introduced House Resolution 7875, “A bill to assure that income allocated as patronage dividends by cooperatives is taxed

⁹⁵ “An Old Enemy Revives,” *Missouri Farmer* (December, 1954), 32.

⁹⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*,” 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 9-10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

either to the cooperative or the patron.”⁹⁸ House Resolution 7875 did not simply represent for-profit businesses’ continued attempts to knock down coops. By this time the NTEA message had taken root in the minds of policy leaders and government bureaucrats. Jay W. Glasmann, Assistant to the Secretary of the Department of the Treasury, testified to the need to find a new way to tax coops and, in effect, overturn the results of Long Poultry Farms, Inc., v. Commissioner.

Corrective legislation is clearly needed because under existing law it is possible for a cooperative to exclude from its taxable income certain noncash patronage dividends paid to its members which, at the same time, are not taxable to the members who receive them.⁹⁹

In fact, House Resolution 7875 was originally conceived and created by the Treasury Department which outlined a number of objectives for this proposal. The Treasury sought to ensure that all cooperative income was taxed at some point, either in the coops’ hands or as income to farmers, even if it was simply in-store credit. More importantly, the Treasury sought this legislation as a corrective to what appeared as unfairness in the market, whether or not such problems were in the policy domain of the Treasury is unclear. Glasmann noted the Treasury sought HR 7875, “to restrict to a reasonable degree the competitive advantages of cooperatives now have of expansion on untaxed retained earnings.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Robert T. Patterson, *The Tax Exemption of Cooperatives* (New York: University Publishers, 1961), 105.

⁹⁹ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*,” 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

In the end, House Resolution 7875 was not needed to restrict the “competitive advantage” of coops. The 1954 IRS code revisions succeeded in doing so.¹⁰¹ The latest Treasury proposal could be viewed as either an overzealous desire to increase Federal revenue or as a sign that the for-profit business sector, represented by the NTEA, had captured the Treasury department through years of media and lobbying efforts. One sign that for-profit business had captured the Treasury Department is the language used by Glasmann in his testimony on HR 7875. “The average business corporation,” Glasmann stated, “is actually somewhat smaller than the average cooperative, in terms of assets and dollar volume of business.”¹⁰² In drawing size comparisons between the average size of coops and corporations, Glasmann implied coops no longer needed a tax advantage.

Yet, policy leaders were not entirely beholden to for-profit business. The Treasury made sure to recognize the need for coops, perhaps just through lip service, as a means of propping up the declining family farm. “I want to emphasize again,” Glasmann urged, “the Treasury Department is fully aware of the importance of cooperatives to our agricultural and farming communities.”¹⁰³ Despite this seeming awareness, the Treasury nonetheless continued pushing to tax non-cash patronage returns.

¹⁰¹ The coop tax debate received final resolution in the Revenue Act of 1962 that required coops to pay at least 20 percent of a farmer’s patronage in cash so the farmer could use that portion to pay the tax due on the remaining 80 percent of the patronage. If the coop failed to do this, the coop became responsible for the tax, but at the higher corporate rate. John A. Baker, Assistant Secretary of the USDA to Paul C. Jones, August 11, 1964, File 2545, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC. Baker’s letter to Jones explains the tax implications of the Revenue Act of 1962.

¹⁰² Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 1-5, 1960, (Washington: GPO, 1960), 10. As most public policy experts will argue, averages are in fact, a terrible indicator or tool for shaping public policy. In this situation, the large number of small corporations pulls down the average size of corporations despite the presence of a few large corporations such as GM and AT&T which both dwarfed even the largest of coops such as the MFA.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Clearly the use of various forms of rhetoric by the NTEA and MFA was more than just a means to debating a tax policy issue. Truly it had a considerable impact of its own. When it comes to cultural values, perception often has a larger impact than reality. The heavy use of rhetoric in this long-lasting and highly charged situation played a part in changing the way that Americans viewed farm people and the special status afforded to family farms. Millions of Americans often relied on media sources to obtain information used to make judgments, especially when they lacked their own personal experience from which to make judgments. As the farm population rapidly dwindled in the post-war era that meant a rising portion of Americans had little or no direct experience with farming. They increasingly had to rely on secondary sources of information such as the media or information presented by lobbying groups such as the NTEA or cooperatives such as the MFA in order to make judgments regarding how well farmers lived up to the values held by society.

In an odd blend of perceptions, Americans came to believe that family farmers, while still deserving of assistance in light of economic difficulties and competition from corporate farms, nonetheless had begun to slip away from the ideal, becoming much more business oriented than in the past. The increasing dependence on large scale technology by farmers, coupled with the growth of coops in the post-war era and their use of business methods led many Americans to believe this. W.R. Ashburn, a strong supporter of the NTEA campaign to tax coops provides one example of the attitude that farmers no longer lived up to the family farm concept.

The family farm of 25 years ago, which many of us regard with nostalgia, has departed from the national scene. Perhaps 5 ½ to 6 percent of our population

produces 90 percent of all marketed farm production and could easily produce all of it. They also get practically all of our agricultural price support subsidies.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the fact that farm coops had assets of \$3.6 billion and an annual gross volume of business of \$13.5 billion in 1954 helped persuade many non-farmers that America's farmers had in fact become just another group of business people.¹⁰⁵ "The size of the average farm has increased substantially," noted Carl Oechsle, the Assistant Secretary of Domestic Affairs for the Department of Commerce.¹⁰⁶ "The technical skill and overall efficiency exercised by the modern farmer," Oechsle continued, "is often equal to the best found in manufacturing enterprise."¹⁰⁷ Yet, the reality of farm population loss and increasing calls to save the family farm also led Americans to believe farm people (i.e. family farms) still deserved some special consideration. In other words, through popular support for tax equality, but also policies to save the family farm, the public concluded that both the NTEA and coops were correct in their arguments. In essence, the agrarian myth increasingly became a myth, but it still resonated and in fact, resonated even more in the post-war period because it was becoming all the more mythical. The ideal family farm, for millions of Americans, was dying.

Similar to the rhetoric of Glasmann and the reality of Treasury Department policies, a gulf emerged between the actions and rhetoric of the various presidents of the post-war era. In taking his plan for agriculture to the Congress in 1961, President Kennedy positioned saving the family farm as the primary policy goal. "The family

¹⁰⁴ Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Tax Treatment of Earnings of Cooperatives*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 1-5, 1960 (Washington: GPO, 1960), 316.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

farm,” President Kennedy declared, “should be protected and preserved as a basic American institution.”¹⁰⁸ Yet, the policies proposed by Kennedy, like the policies of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower before him, provided quite limited assistance to the goal of saving the family farm. The decline of the family farm throughout the post-war era only quickened despite, or perhaps due to, the policies put in place for the sake of saving the family farm. Indicative of this decline, the MFA peaked in membership in the mid 1950s at around 155,000 members.¹⁰⁹ By then the new tax laws and declining farm populations began to take their toll. MFA membership declined just as the total national farm population declined. In light of the tax policy debate and the associated rhetorical battle just covered, two questions arise. Just how useful were federal agricultural policies of the post-war era in saving the family farm? Also, how do we explain the divergence in ideals and reality that both influenced and resulted from policies implemented in the post-World War II era? It is to these questions we turn next.

¹⁰⁸ “Text of the President’s Message to Congress Offering a Program for Agriculture,” *New York Times* (March 17, 1961). President Kennedy proposed increased agricultural research to raise productivity and cost effectiveness of farming, programs to increase consumption and finally a weak reference to allowing farmers to work together through cooperatives. As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, policies such as these aided the entire industry, not a particular subset, which only aggravated the disadvantages smaller, family farms experienced.

¹⁰⁹ “Report of the Resolutions Committee: MFA Annual Convention,” *Missouri Farmer* (Aug. 15, 1960).

“An American Export of Hope:” Agricultural Policy in the Truman Years

In June of 1951, in the midst of the Korean War and at the height of Cold War tensions, Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan initiated a survey and farm policy review. The Family Farm Policy Review surveyed farm people’s opinions and reviewed existing policy for its effectiveness in saving or aiding the family farm. The Department of Agriculture used its local officials and offices as contacts and opinion gatherers to the millions of farm people it served. Brannan instructed USDA local officials “to invite farmer organizations, church agencies, land grant colleges or universities, and any civic group with a purpose of improving agriculture or rural living to participate in the survey.”¹ The Family Farm Policy Review was innovative for its time. It was the first time that a sitting Secretary of Agriculture pursued such a large survey to obtain the opinions of the millions of farm people served by the USDA. More importantly, the title, content, and final evaluation of the review indicate not only a focus on how to better serve family farms, but that USDA officials had to reform many existing policies in order to meet this new policy goal.²

Documents from the Family Farm Policy Review provide keen insight into the ways in which U.S. farm policy proceeded in the years immediately following the end of

¹ Letter from Charles F. Brannan to the Chairman of the State Agricultural Mobilization Committees, June 22, 1951, Box 1, File “Land reform-family farm-general, 1950-52 (A-E),” Clarence J. McCormick Papers, Harry S Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

² One can view in another way the significance of the Family Farm Policy Review as an indicator of the novelty of saving the family farm. Had saving the family farm been a policy goal earlier this review would either have occurred much earlier in U.S. history or would not have been conducted at all.

World War II through the completion of Truman's presidency. In the span of less than seven years, agricultural policy leaders in the Truman Administration faced the end of World War II, continued food shortages in Europe with price controls and rationing in the U.S. followed by domestic overproduction and glutted commodity markets. The Korean War then caused commodity prices to skyrocket. Heightened Cold War tensions made their way not only into every facet of American life, but every government policy as well. Meanwhile, Americans at this time came to view corporate farming as a legitimate threat to America's small farm heritage. The growing rural-to-urban migration only compounded this sense of impending loss.

For the first time in American history, saving the family farm became a policy goal of the federal government.³ However, creating a politically feasible policy solution became nearly impossible for the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations.⁴

Agricultural historians and public policy scholars explain this failure to stem the loss of family farms as due to government inertia or a general lack of care for the family farm. Others even make a more extreme argument that government had become beholden to special interests, namely helping agribusiness seeking greater profit margins in the food

³ As early as the 1860s it was national policy to expand agriculture and aid in improving agricultural output. That policy did not change and continues yet to this day. Other policy goals, however, have changed over time. At the turn of the 20th century, popular concern, namely through the Country Life Movement, worried about the poverty that dominated farm life. The goal through the 1930s and somewhat into the post-World War II period sought to raise farm standard of living. This goal was not guided by the fear of a loss of small farms, rather by the fear of stagnant production as urban populations grew. During the New Deal, farm policy centered on market and production stabilization to recover and then prevent another Great Depression. Farm numbers actually rose during this period. Small farms, while not strong, at least were not yet challenged. Not until the rapid post-war rural-to-urban migration and growth of corporate/industrial agriculture did saving the family farm become a major policy goal.

⁴ Chapter 5 will examine farm policy under President Eisenhower.

supply chain or by allowing corporate entities entering farming to take advantage of special tax laws in agriculture to reduce their tax bill.⁵

While these arguments might satisfactorily explain the inability of government to address the decline of the family farm, we must address two important realities that challenge these oversimplified conclusions. First, debate within the Truman Administration shows a genuine concern for the family farm. Charles Brannan wrangled with this issue for a considerable time and thus devised his ill-fated Brannan Plan. But if one is still disinclined to believe that leadership had genuine concern for the idyllic family farm, the Cold War made saving the family farm a foreign policy imperative that required the Truman Administration to pursue family farm-friendly policies for what they saw as the sake of the free world. Second, the fact that farmers and non-farmers alike held strong opinions on farm policy at this time often meant that politicians concerned with reelection could not simply disregard them and pursue corporate-friendly policies. Truly, forces much larger and broader than what policy and business elites could control guided farm policy development in the post-war years.

Another way to look at this issue is to ask, if saving the family farm was so popular, why did government policy not only take such a limited approach, but utterly fail to stem the decline of farm numbers and the trend toward large, corporate farms? Throughout the Truman years, and the Eisenhower years for that matter, the policy debate centered around fixed versus flexible price supports. Highly educated and experienced farm policy leaders such as Clinton Anderson, Charles Brannan and Eisenhower's Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson all had to understand the fact

⁵ William P. Browne, et al, *Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 15; and Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 4.

that any price support, flexible or fixed, provided aid based on total production and therefore actually aided larger farms, oftentimes corporate, more so than smaller, typically family farms. And yet, this became the main policy tool for aiding family farms. We have to ask the simple question, why was that the case? The answer, in short, is that when isolated as a policy goal, saving the family farm received overwhelming support across the board, not just from farmers. However, to effectively “save the family farm,” policy leaders would have had to implement government actions that went against larger societal values of equality of treatment and/or opportunity, belief in technology as a means of progress, as well as the belief that efficiency and productivity must be rewarded.⁶

Unlike policy goals of the Progressive Era or New Deal that sought to improve farm efficiency and raise the standard of living of farm people, the goal of saving the family farm countered broadly held values. The debate and public response to the Brannan Plan—the first and last government effort to take considerably new action to save the family farm—provides insight into how people perceived government action that seemed valuable (in saving the family farm) and yet at the same time “socialistic” (in failing to adhere to societal ideals of equal opportunity and rewarding productivity).

And just as larger societal values prevented the Brannan Plan from passage, so too did they prevent policy leaders from seeing particular characteristics of post-war agriculture as the source of the problem confronting family farms. In the policy process,

⁶ Dale Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture: Public Policy in a Democratic Society* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), 10. Earl O. Heady and Lee G. Burchinal, “The Concern with Goals and Values in Agriculture,” *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 9; and Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 106. Cochrane noted the three principles of the American creed that shape policy, belief in enterprise, belief in democracy and belief in technology. (106)

problem definition has such a profound and yet hidden role that it is at once present, yet not.⁷ The process of problem definition determines, from the outset, the problem and, from there, the range of policy solutions. Since the industrial revolution, Americans have valued productivity and efficient production, especially through technology. Although these factors drove the cost-price squeeze, Americans would refuse to consider them the source of problems for family farms. Instead, farm policies under the Truman Administration sought to continue long-established policies aimed at improving farm efficiency. In essence policy leaders determined that more efficiency and production provided the solution to saving the family farm, and not the problems requiring redress. This resulted in propelling even further the cost-price squeeze that forced so many out of agriculture in the 1940s through the 1960s.

Considering the fact that few recognize the impact of overarching societal values in the policy process there is little historical record that directly discusses the connection.⁸ Politicians and other policy leaders knew the general public valued productivity, believed in technology, believed in rewarding work, and sought economic stability so they rarely had to call upon such values explicitly as justification for policy proposals. It was just assumed that everyone knew those were the values and hence, goals toward which policies were aimed. However, we can mine the historical record for hidden clues that

⁷ Coverage of problem definition in the policy process can be found in John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995); Frank Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agenda and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Keith Mueller, "The Role of Policy Analysis in Agenda Setting," *Policy Studies Journal* 16 (1988): 441-454; and David J. Webber, "Analyzing Political Feasibility: Political Scientists' Unique Contribution to Policy Analysis," *Policy Studies Journal* 14 (1986): 545-63. A case study that shows the importance of problem definition in the policy process is John Portz, "Problem Definitions and Policy Analysis: Shaping the Educational Agenda in Boston," *Policy Studies Journal* 24 (1996): 371-86.

⁸ Peter A. Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: the Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain," *Comparative Politics* 25 (April 1993), 279. Hall notes that in the policy paradigm, the language and terms used are so influential that they are taken for granted and unchallengeable.

provide insight into how policy leaders such as Charles Brannan connected their policy proposals to particular over-arching societal values and goals. Moreover, most debate within policy areas such as agriculture did not center on which values to support. Rather, the debate focused on the best means or tools to achieve those goals.⁹ Developments in the post-war era, particularly problems associated with the agricultural revolution, however, created value contradictions that quickly led to policy problems.

Finally, to best see all of these processes and forces, especially the role of societal values at work in farm policy development, it is best to take a historical approach. Too often public policy scholars isolate a policy arena from its context, removing from study the impact that broad societal values, world political conditions, as well as of the recent historical memory of the main characters have on the policy process.¹⁰ In this specific situation, the context of post-war economic uncertainty, a quickly escalating Cold War filled with heightened anxieties and a farm population loss never before imagined sets the stage for President Truman, Secretaries of Agriculture Anderson and Brannan, and other policy leaders to find a way to save the family farm.

With the United States' entrance into World War II, American farmers, for the first time since 1919, experienced high, profitable prices for their products. The war had enlarged farm markets, removing surpluses while driving up prices. Ignoring for a moment all of the difficulties of fighting a war, farmers celebrated the rapid improvement

⁹ Peter A. Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: the Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain," *Comparative Politics* 25 n. 3 (April 1993), 279.

¹⁰ Examples of works that remove agricultural policy from the historical and social value context include: Reo Christenson, *The Brannan Plan: Farm Politics and Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Robert Paarlberg and Don Paarlberg, "Agricultural Policy in the Twentieth Century," *Agricultural History* 74 (2000): 136-61 and Philip M. Raup, "Corporate Farming in the United States," *Journal of Economic History* 3 (March 1973): 274-90.

of seemingly perpetually down-turned markets. American farmers, nonetheless, could not shake the fear, however rosy the market outlook, of a potential return to low prices with the end of fighting. “The threat of surpluses, of course is the single biggest worry,” as one journalist noted. “Coupled with that is the memory of what surpluses did to farm prices in the early 1930s.”¹¹ No farmer could ignore the memory of trying to survive through the Great Depression. That fear became even stronger for older farmers who had experienced farm markets bottoming out after World War I. For too long farmers lived in a vulnerable state.

The recent memory of damaging surpluses guided farmers to not only continue to pursue policies set up in the New Deal, particularly market stabilization, but to use the war situation and their newfound role as the providers of the “food that will win the war” to garner longer-term stability, and decent prices, in the market. Moreover, the memory of low prices and the Great Depression came to having an enduring impact on policy development in the post-war era.¹² “I want never again to see the misery we had in the Great Depression,” noted Secretary Anderson. “As a former Congressman and as Secretary of Agriculture,” he continued, “I see the importance of the policy of plenty to the general welfare.”¹³

Farmers found willing allies within government leadership as they sought to set up policies that urged farmers to produce at maximum output for the sake of feeding the

¹¹ “There’s Farm Work Waiting in Congress,” *Co-op Grain Quarterly* (1946), found in File 2937, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

¹² William P. Browne, et al., *Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992). Browne et al. note: “Agricultural policy, we find, responds to the past far more than it does to any current issues and problems.” (3)

¹³ Clinton Anderson, “USDA Testimony Proposing Long Range Agricultural Policy and Programs,” before Congressional Committees on Agriculture (Washington: USGPO, 1947), 7, found in Box 13, Clinton Anderson Papers, Truman Library.

nation, the troops and allied people suffering in war-torn regions. Throughout 1941 and early 1942 the Federal government emptied government food surpluses to meet immediate needs. However, in doing so, retail food prices rose until brought under control by the Emergency Price Control Act in January of 1942 which set a ceiling on farm commodity prices at 100 percent of parity until September of that year.¹⁴ In short, parity is a formula devised during the 1930s as a way of mathematically determining a fair price for farm commodities based on the cost of a collection of items farmers typically purchased. Under this formula, the government could purchase farm products at a minimum price to help maintain what many considered a fair price for farmers in relation to urban buying power. The relative buying power of farmers to consumers during the 1910 to 1914 period became the normative definition of parity. The idea quite simply provided a means of ensuring that farm income, and hence farm standard of living, could at least keep pace with that of urban America.

To make a price ceiling amenable to farmers, Congressional leaders stipulated that a floor of 90 percent of parity would be maintained throughout the war and for a full two years after the official end of the war.¹⁵ This became known as the Steagall Amendment, named for Representative Henry Steagall from Alabama who introduced the requirement.

The Emergency Price Control Act, especially the Steagall Amendment, in combination with price and wage controls succeeded not only in stabilizing farm prices

¹⁴ Gilbert Fite, *American Agriculture and Farm Policy Since 1900* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 20 and R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 100.

¹⁵ Fite, *American Agriculture*, 21 and Willard Cochrane and Mary Ryan, *American Farm Policy, 1948-1973* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 134. The 1942 Price Control Act became the first piece of legislation that established a parity ratio as a direct goal and not simply a concept to guide legislation.

throughout the war effort, but in convincing farmers that a secure market existed for all of the production they could muster. By 1943, the federal government had become the #1 buyer of food goods in the U.S. This included 30 percent of butter, 50 percent of canned vegetables and 80 percent of lower grade beef.¹⁶ As a response to the new market condition, not to mention the patriotic fervor of producing food to feed the troops and allied people, farmers used all of their ability to raise production. American farmers met the call to production, fulfilling the government slogan, “Food Will Win the War.”¹⁷

However, farmers’ patriotic obligations to maximize production did not end with the conclusion of the war. Secretary of Agriculture and War Food Administrator under President Roosevelt, Claude Wickard knew that world food supply would remain low for the immediate post-war period, thus the rejoinder to “Food Will Win the War,” became “and Win the Peace.”¹⁸ This food need continued well after the conclusion of the war as nations not only had to recover from the fighting, but also had to re-establish their food production and supply chains. As late as the December of 1947, European and Asian nations still depended on U.S. farm production to bolster their food supply.¹⁹ Justifying the diversion of U.S. food in the face of rising domestic food prices, President Truman noted the dire emergency of people starving across Europe and elsewhere.²⁰ Moreover, a

¹⁶ John T. Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975), 214.

¹⁷ Fite, *American Agriculture and Farm Policy*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *First Report to Congress on the United States Foreign Aid Program* (Washington: GPO, 1948), 2, Box 1273, File OF 426, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

²⁰ “Statement by the President,” February 17, 1947, Box 1273, File OF 426, Truman Library.

report from James A. Stillwell, Deputy Coordinator of Emergency Export Programs in May of 1947 reinforced the urgency of Europe's food needs.

The United States military authorities in Germany advise us that they cannot maintain a 1550 calorie ration in the two zones of Germany with the stocks of grain on hand plus all the shipments which have been scheduled from the United States and other areas. The Italian Ambassador has just presented me with a note which indicates that a breakdown in the bread ration in Italy is imminent unless an additional 60,000 tons of grain can be secured from the United States.²¹

Stillwell knew fulfilling these needs would cause consumer unrest at home by having “an unfavorable inflationary effect on the market,” but understandably pushed for the food delivery out of a sense of responsibility since the U.S. had it “within our power to secure the supplies necessary to prevent [disaster].”²² As members of the Food Conference noted in a press release, “The last great reservoir from which starvation can be halted is the United States.”²³

The moral imperative to feed the world recovering from war pushed post-war agricultural policy leaders to examine their policy goals. Since the New Deal of the 1930s and even earlier, government policy focused on market stabilization of both goods sold and purchased by farmers as well as aiding farmers to improve production and efficiency. Political leaders achieved these goals through the Capper-Volstead Act which allowed farm coops to develop and prosper. They also continued agricultural education and research aimed toward educating farmers on better growing techniques and production enhancing technologies.

²¹ James A. Stillwell, Deputy Coordinator of Emergency Export Programs, *Memorandum for the President*, May 5, 1947, File OF 426, Truman Library.

²² *Ibid*, 426.

²³ Press release, “Remarks of the President to the Members of the Food Conference, March 1, 1946, File OF 950, Truman Library.

By 1946, with the continued food shortages and rising domestic food prices, the imperative to maintain farm production at maximum rates stood even stronger. Moreover, political leaders came to believe in Growth Liberalism. Under the logic of Growth Liberalism, the government would seek policies to grow the economy in order to improve the incomes of all Americans. This became a popular alternative and compromise between “trickle down” policies of Republican Administrations and redistributive policies of recent Democratic Administrations. Under Growth Liberalism, the pie would not be redivided, but grown so that everyone’s slice became bigger. Full production by agriculture became a key step to ensuring the success of Growth Liberalism. Indicative of the new belief in Growth Liberalism, President Truman signed into law the Employment Act of 1946 stating the responsibility of the federal government as “to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power.”²⁴ Agriculture played a vital role in maintaining high income and employment by supplying “a large share of both the raw materials and the market for industry.”²⁵ Similarly, full employment promised to aid the farmer since “the farmer can sell more food at good prices when the incomes of wage earners are high and when there is full employment.”²⁶

Consumers held a unique perspective on the topic of agricultural production. Although they understood the purpose of aiding starving people suffering from post-war recovery, U.S. consumers none the less complained of rising food prices after the end of World War II. With the lifting of rationing and price controls in 1947, the combination

²⁴ Clinton Anderson, *USDA Testimony Proposing Long Range Agricultural Policy and Programs Before Congressional Committees on Agriculture* (USDA, 1947), 7-8. Clinton Anderson Papers, Box 13: Agriculture Dept. File: Farm Policy, testimony before Congressional Committees on Agriculture, Truman Library.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Harry S Truman, “State of the Union Address,” January 8, 1948, Box 1263, File “419F State of the Union-1948,” Folder 7, Official File, Truman Library.

of a pent up domestic demand and continued foreign needs overwhelmed domestic supplies, inflating food prices. Between June of 1947 and June of 1948 overall retail food prices rose 10 percent. Retail dairy prices rose 20 percent and retail meat prices had hit record highs in June of 1948 with little sign of change.²⁷

Farmers, worried that inflation would continue, often tried to hold onto their products as long as possible until marketing them in the hopes of reaping the higher prices sure to come with continued inflation. From the farmers' perspective, marketing products early actually meant lost profit and lower buying power. "Farmers are asking whether future prices are going to skyrocket and thereby shrink the buying power of what they earned this year," Secretary Anderson noted. "And the men who have crops or livestock yet to market," Anderson concluded, "are asking the same questions."²⁸ Food prices, while rising, generally kept pace with an inflationary trend with the removal of price or wage controls.

Yet, consumers could not help but voice their frustration with a farm policy that ensured farmers a profit, namely the Steagall Amendment guaranteeing 90 percent parity, which many interpreted as the root cause of rising food retail prices and the overall cost of living.²⁹ Consumers called Secretary of Agriculture Anderson "inflationist" for

²⁷ Congress, Senate, Committee on Banking and Currency, *Hearing in Regard to the President's Proposed Anti-Inflation Program*, 93rd Cong., 2nd Sess., August 4, 1948, (Washington: GPO, 1948), 1-2, 5.

²⁸ Clinton Anderson, "Farm Prices and Agricultural Welfare," press release, September 24, 1946, File: USDA 2093-46, Clinton Anderson Papers, Truman Library.

²⁹ Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 95. See: Allen Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) for a full treatment of consumer concerns over food prices in the wake of World War II.

suggesting to raise already rising food prices as a way to stem economy-wide inflation.³⁰ Consumers wrongly assumed the government's floor on commodity prices meant that retail prices also contained a floor. For some, the use of price supports had the appearance of charging consumers double. First they paid for higher retail food prices and second, they paid taxes that then went to propping up food prices. While this thinking resonated with angry consumers it did not represent reality. Price supports subsidized farmers only when market prices fell below 90 percent of parity, which did not happen in the immediate post-war years. Had prices fallen below the 90 percent level, supports would have maintained farm income. The government would take lower prices on their purchased commodities which would have meant lower retail prices with consumers paying the tax bill, but getting subsidized food.

Nonetheless, farmers and farm policy leadership had to deflect considerable criticism coming from consumers enraged at how quickly the cost of food, a necessity of life, was rising in the late 1940s. Americans had assumed that an end to the war would mean an end to food rationing and price controls. With rising incomes and pent up purchasing ability, consumers chafed at government restrictions. When consumers could finally purchase food without the limitations of rationing tickets they found food prices rising on a seemingly daily basis. One frustrated consumer wrote to her Congressman, wrapping in all of the frustration and misunderstanding most consumers had about the source of the heavy inflation.

Secretary Anderson should be able to do something about high food prices. He is the one who is causing it. Not only food but everything I buy is from ten cents to ten dollars more than it was yesterday. That subsidy is the worst. It's taking from

³⁰ "Price Runaway," *Wall Street Journal* (11 Jan. 1946), 1.

those who have not and giving to those who have, and our constitution says “Justice for all.”³¹

Farm organizations and farm policy leadership under Truman did their best to convince consumers that neither farmers nor political leaders deserved the blame for rising food prices. John Sims, Secretary of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation noted,

I can never remember a time before in our history when farmers have been so severely criticized as now. You can scarcely pick up a newspaper or magazine without reading an attack on farmers. Turn on the radio and likely as not you will hear some commentator ranting that the agriculture farm support program is unfair and a steal by farmers.³²

In response to the seemingly endless calls by consumers to end farm subsidies, the American Farm Bureau Federation urged, “Inflation—not the farmers or farm organizations—is responsible for high prices.”³³ Secretary of Agriculture Anderson and then Brannan continually made the case that high domestic demand coupled with high foreign demand caused rising food prices while rising consumer buying power causing general inflation certainly did not help the situation. Farm Bureau leadership, at this time still aligned with other farm organizations in seeking government aid to farmers, urged their membership and the general public, much like other farm groups had urged, to remember the Great Depression.

The public sometimes forgets that all during the depression years of the ‘30s farmers’ incomes were at rock bottom levels. And the thing to remember is that they could fall there again if we are not aggressive in protecting our interest.³⁴

³¹ Pauline Garth to James Kem from Pauline Garth, September 25, 1947, File 2946, James P. Kem Papers, WHMC.

³² John W. Sims, “We Must Tell the Farmer’s Story,” *Ohio Farm Bureau News* (October, 1948), found in Box 28, Wallace J. Campbell Papers, Truman Library.

³³ “Blame Inflation—Not Farmers,” *Missouri Farm Bureau News* (September 26, 1951), found in File 10496, O.R. Johnson Papers, WHMC.

³⁴ Sims, “We Must Tell the Farmer’s Story,” *Ohio Farm Bureau News* (Oct. 1948).

A number of factors led to the continuation of high, fixed price supports to induce farmers to continue their all-out effort of production as seen during the war years while also providing them with a vital safety net to prevent a relapse into the horrible conditions experienced during the Great Depression.³⁵ The Truman Administration, guided by the philosophy of Growth Liberalism, pushed for maximum agricultural output. Continuing world demand for American farm commodities and domestic consumer pressure for lower food prices provided moral and market pressures for maximum farm production. Meanwhile, the unavoidable memory of the experiences of the Great Depression convinced many farmers they had to not only make money when the market was right but to get in place policies that prevented downturns in farm prices. But just as this stage had been set, major changes in the policy landscape loomed over the horizon. Fixed price supports at 90 percent of parity were set to expire in 1948. If that occurred federal agricultural policy would revert back to New Deal legislation that had supports, but not at the war-induced rates farmers enjoyed throughout the 1940s.

Reforming price supports and getting off of war-time rates became a major political debate during the 1948 presidential election. President Truman had successfully urged the Republican led Congress to pass the Agriculture Act of 1948 which would have continued fixed price supports for another two years, until January 1, 1950.³⁶ While such a proposal pleased farmers who still represented a considerable voting cohort, the 1948 Act also included aspects that would ease the nation out of wartime food policies. The

³⁵ The Marshall Plan, officially titled The Foreign Assistance Act of 1948 required nations to form a recovery plan and purchase agricultural products from the U.S. So to some degree, inflationary food prices came as a result of foreign policy, just not agricultural policy.

³⁶ Willard W. Cochrane and Mary E. Ryan, *American Farm Policy, 1948-1873* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 137.

Act not only established the implementation of flexible price supports as of January 1st, 1950, but redefined parity as well.

Before the 1948 Agriculture Act, Congress defined parity according to farmers' buying power in the years of 1910-1914. This ensured that farmers' buying power kept up with that of urban America. However, the formula included a considerable problem. By locking in the years 1910-1914, parity rates would fail to take into consideration the impact of major technological changes occurring since that time, especially in the post-World War II years. Policy leaders noticed this problem while consumers came to see the static formula as particularly unfair. Why should farmers continue to receive prices obtained during a time of lower output and higher production costs? Per bushel production costs of field crops had plummeted with the mass implementation of tractors, hybrid seeds and chemical treatments such as fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Similarly, per gallon production costs of milk dropped considerably with the rapid expansion of electricity to rural America after World War II. Simply put, the technological revolution made a historically-based parity formula obsolete. In the place of the old parity concept, President Truman sought to base the parity formula on the average price farmers received during the most recent ten marketing years.³⁷

This formula had three advantages. First, it updated parity to consider the impact on prices of increased production through technology. Second, in taking the average over the last ten years, the new parity formula provided a means of slowly stepping down federal support. As commodity prices slowly declined, Federal support prices would also decline. The third advantage was mainly political in that it provided a delay for the

³⁷ *Summary of HR 6248 or 'Agricultural Act of 1948'*, Box 4, File: Agriculture of 1948—HR 6248, Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

impending adjustment in farm numbers resulting from the technological revolution. The 1948 Act provided the option of basing support on either the old or new formula as a transition, giving farmers the better of the two. It also allowed no more than a 5 percent drop in supports in a year.³⁸ Moreover, under the new formula, price support levels would be inflated due to wartime prices of the early 1940s, effectively raising supports above the old 90 percent level for the first four or five years the new formula was applied. Rice supports would go from \$1.97 per bushel to \$2.27. Milk supports would rise from \$3.87 per 100 pounds to \$4.41. Wool would also rise from \$.44 per pound to \$.50.³⁹ These numbers ensured high supports for farmers for the near future while at the same time appeasing consumers with a sense that political leaders had implemented reform. Considering farmers' substantial political power through the farm bloc political leaders concerned about re-election wisely gave farmers what they wanted, continuation of fixed supports.⁴⁰

The passage of the 1948 Agriculture Act provided a significant boost to President Truman's re-election campaign that year against Republican Thomas Dewey, governor of New York.⁴¹ In fact, the farm vote proved the decisive and surprising vote that clinched Truman's re-election. In campaigning throughout Midwestern farm states, Truman highlighted the passage of his Agricultural Act, but also noted that the Republican led

³⁸ Congressional Quarterly Service, *U.S. Agricultural Policy in the Postwar Years, 1945-1963: Development of U.S. Farm Problems; an 18-year Legislative Review*, (Washington: USGPO, 1963), 25.

³⁹ *The Agricultural Act of 1949, A Digest* (October 1949), 5, found in Box 4, File: Agricultural Act of 1949, Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Fite, *American Agriculture and Farm Policy Since 1900* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 22.

⁴¹ For a complete analysis of Truman's 1948 victory see Robert Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Modern American Presidency* (Longman Press, 1983),

Congress refused to enact other proposals aimed at aiding farmers. He also highlighted Republicans' efforts to reduce the storage capacity of the Commodity Credit Corporation, a federally created entity that provided storage of farm commodities so farmers could have flexibility when selling their products to get the highest price. Truman further noted Republican efforts to raise taxes on farm coops to levels that would effectively kill coops; hence he called it the "death tax." Further, Truman noted Republican attempts to lower price supports in the name of reducing government costs. Midwestern farmers, despite their conservative values, supported Truman because of his efforts on their behalf and because Truman was adept at using farmers' fears of a new farm depression to enlist their support.⁴²

The 1949 Agricultural Act established a new formula for supporting farmers that would induce them to produce more for the sake of world demand and reducing retail food costs paid by consumers yet would ensure stable markets for farmers. The 1949 Agriculture Act in many ways mimicked the 1948 act. It offered a new parity formula based on the average price of the previous 10 marketing years, contained provisions to eventually turn to flexible supports and acreage controls and also delayed implementation of flexible supports. The 1949 act established flexible supports with a possible range between 80 and 90 percent for 1951, 70 to 90 percent for 1952 and 60 to 90 percent thereafter, to be determined by the Secretary of Agriculture, but then delayed implementation of flexible supports until 1952.⁴³ Until then, supports would remain fixed

⁴² Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost*, 107.

⁴³ U. S. Department of Agriculture, Production and Marketing Administration, *The Agricultural Act of 1949, a Digest*, (October, 1949), 2, found in Box 4, File: Agricultural Act of 1949, Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

at the wartime rate of 90 percent.⁴⁴ This ensured continued high production to meet foreign and domestic demand and stable markets for farmers while adhering to the philosophy of Growth Liberalism that called for policies of abundance, even if such policies created problems with surplus production.

The 1948 and 1949 Agriculture Acts provided the first opportunity for policy leaders to make changes to federal agricultural law in light of changes occurring in the post-war period, namely the technological revolution that greatly increased total production while also improving farm cost efficiency. These acts promised new tools; nonetheless these acts represent little change in basic purpose of federal agricultural law. In other words, they found a new route, but to get to the same destination of abundant production, market stabilization, and parity prices. Moreover, the acts represent a continuation of the underlying values that had for so long been the basis for agricultural policy since the early part of the 20th Century. The rhetoric of the family farm had not yet fully entered the agricultural policy process.

When reading the historical documents with an eye toward underlying values, one can begin to see how heavily they influenced the entire policy process from problem definition and proposed solutions through implementation and policy evaluation. Such is the case with various press releases, internal communications and other documents of the Truman Administration and its attempt to confront the changing realities of agriculture. Time and again President Truman, Secretaries Anderson and Brannan, and other policy leaders attempted to correlate new agricultural policies to broad societal values.

⁴⁴ The repeated delay of implementation of flexible supports for the sake of maintaining fixed supports proved to be a considerable policy debate. In *An Opportunity Lost*, Dean notes the deep disagreement in using fixed v. flexible price supports (77). This highly debated policy area and the significance of the debate will be discussed in depth later in the chapter.

Throughout the process they repeatedly related new and often contentious policies to long-held societal values as a means of gaining support for their actions.

Immediately following the end of fighting in World War II, Secretary of Agriculture Clinton Anderson released a statement that provides some insight into the values that provided the basis for policies.

A re-conversion policy for agriculture involves three basic objectives: 1) to protect farm income against a possible sudden decline in farm prices due to shrinking market outlets at home or abroad, 2) to maintain the highest possible consumption level at home and to develop export opportunities, and 3) to assist farmers in shifting their resources to those commodities that are most needed in peacetime.⁴⁵

Clearly Anderson believed farm policy ought to be directed toward three long-established policy goals, namely abundant production, stabilization of markets and incomes, and obtaining parity of rural standards of living with those of urban areas. These goals became all the more important as uncertainty in world food production, rising domestic food prices and the world instability caused by the start of the Cold War took effect.

Several years after leaving office, President Truman addressed Congress in the midst of another agricultural policy debate during the Eisenhower years that considered the overhaul of an agriculture policy based on 1930's New Deal policies. In speaking with measured distance from his own presidency, Truman's comments allow insight into the values behind his own agricultural policies as well as how he saw them fitting into the historical picture. In doing so he called on Congress in 1958 to continue to use the values of abundance, efficiency and parity as "a sound legislative base" for farm policy. "The fundamental national policy underlying our agricultural legislation," Truman noted, "has

⁴⁵ "Farm Price Policy During the Reconversion Period," (Sept. 18, 1945), Box 4, File: Agriculture, Patterns for., Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

been and should continue to be one of organized, sustained, realistic abundance.”⁴⁶

Truman followed with calls to maintain specific policies geared toward “sound and lasting economic well-being for our farm population, with parity of prices and income,” “improved levels of nutrition and living for all our people” and “ever-increasing efficiency in production and distribution.”⁴⁷

These values of stability, productivity and improved rural standard of living were not new by any means. Each of these had been overarching values or goals since the 19th century. In the midst of the Civil War President Lincoln established the policy of supporting Land Grant Universities to conduct research and development to improve the productivity and efficiency of agriculture. At the turn of the 20th century, the Country Life Movement sought to improve productivity and the standard of living of rural people through education by experiment stations and extension services. Also, the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 as well as the New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 both sought to stabilize farm commodity markets to reduce wild price swings which often caused the most difficulty for the families of smaller and lower income farms.

While these immediate post-war years can be seen as a continuation of the values and policies long established they also represent a time of a major development, namely the concern for a particular type or form of agricultural production, the family farm. Granted, discussion of the condition of the family farm had begun before World War II. However, such discussion remained of little consequence in that few took notice. Before the 1940s, few distinguished between the different types of farming. After all, at that time family farms represented the only viable type. Corporate farming, while

⁴⁶ Press Release, “Truman’s Address to Congress” (May 14, 1958), Box 829, File 227, Official File, Truman Library.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

established, remained inconsequential and did not challenge family farming because of the lack of technology necessary to expand a farm beyond the labor supply of the family and the lack of solid profit potential in farming. Unlike earlier periods when farm population did not rise as fast as the urban population, farm numbers began a serious and lasting decline in numbers in the 1940s. This decline proportionately heightened the alarm of loss of agrarian values. Moreover, without an actual decline in number of family farms there could be no sense of urgency to save it.

By 1948, the impact of the post-war technological revolution became visible. Farm numbers began a sharp decline while rural-to-urban migration proportionately picked up strength. Similarly, with new technology such as tractors and electricity, farm size and structure began to grow considerably, particularly in the areas of poultry and crop production, changing the nature of many farms from small units to considerably large entities. This shift and the rapidity with which it progressed created concern. For years, Americans, not just farmers, valued the agrarian base. In the post-war years, they began to ask what was to happen to the nation if it actually lost this agrarian base.

Consumers in particular experienced a rapid change of heart in 1947 and 1948. Throughout the war and immediate post-war years, consumers experienced rather high retail food prices. As long as they had to pay what to them seemed like high prices their concern for the condition of a particular type of farming was suppressed. Recall that during these early post-war years of high retail prices, farmers received considerable criticism for reaping high profits while policy leaders similarly received flack from the

public for maintaining high fixed supports for farmers who at the time did not seem to need them.⁴⁸

By late 1947, however, farm commodity markets took a considerable turn. Not only had American farmers raised their output to meet world and domestic needs, but European producers had started to recover from the war. Quickly, commodity shortages turned into surpluses, stopping the inflation of retail food prices and in some cases, driving down prices. With consumers' needs for low-priced food met, they could now develop concern for farmers, the very group they had criticized for the past few years. Farmers, after all, now faced low prices for their commodities on the open market. Many turned to government programs to unload their products at supported prices. The federal government again became a major purchaser of commodities. This time, however, they had nowhere to go with them. In the process the Department of Agriculture racked up billions of dollars of bills just to store the surplus commodities, creating popular concern over costs of the farm program. Between 1947 and 1949, the Department of Agriculture set price supports on potatoes at the lowest legal limit yet the government accumulated 50 million bushels of which the government tried to give away and even destroy. In burning potatoes or letting some rot in fields, the USDA created a tremendous public uproar over having to pay to destroy food that the government initially supported to grow.⁴⁹ And yet, farm numbers continued to decline at a rapid pace despite the assistance. Saving the family farm quickly grew in importance as a goal to consider in the farm policy process.

⁴⁸ "We Must Tell the Farmer's Story," *Ohio Farm Bureau News* (Oct. 1948) and Pauline Garth to James Kem, September 25, 1947, File 2946, James P. Kem papers, WHMC.

⁴⁹ J. William Firor, "The Brannan Farm Plan," *Georgia Business* 9 (March 1950), 5, found Box 10, Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

Under this new condition the imperative arose for new policies that would somehow continue to support an agriculture that rewarded efficiency, provided stability and raised the living condition of rural Americans to that of urban Americans while now taking into consideration the concern to prevent the decline of the family farm. In 1947, Secretary of Agriculture Clinton Anderson outlined broad objectives involved in agriculture policy. Highly similar to the objectives of production, efficiency and parity to farm people that had guided agriculture policy of the past, Anderson's stated objectives included "Production of the kinds and quantities of food necessary to provide every person in this country with a nutritionally adequate diet," "development of greatly increased efficiency in production...of farm products" and "Assurance of adequate returns to farmers...comparable with those available to other segments of the national economy."⁵⁰ In essence, Anderson succinctly noted that "the Department of Agriculture stands for abundant production."⁵¹ It was President Truman's new Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Brannan, who took over for Anderson in May of 1948 to pursue policies to meet the new demand to save a particular type of agriculture.⁵²

Adding this latest policy goal of aiding a particular type of farm created considerable tensions. On the one hand, it was Federal policy to aid the growth of individual farms to achieve improved income levels to support a family and raise farm

⁵⁰ "Patterns for Agriculture," revised draft (January 29, 1947), 2, Box 4, File: Agriculture, Patterns for, Clinton Anderson Papers, Truman Library.

⁵¹ "Farm Prices and Agricultural Welfare," (September 24, 1946), Box 4, File: USDA 2093-46, Clinton Anderson Papers, Truman Library.

⁵² Anderson left the Truman Administration in order to pursue a senate seat for the State of New Mexico which he won. As a senator, Anderson stood against the Brannan Plan. President Truman credited Anderson with preventing a post-war price decline "which was so disastrous to American farmers after World War I" and was "still a bitter memory to its victims." Truman to Anderson, May 10, 1948, File 26, Official Files, Truman Library.

efficiency often achieved in larger operations. But on the other hand, it became a value imperative of aiding one type of farm (smaller, typically less cost-efficient farms) over another type of farm (larger or corporate farms that had achieved more efficient use of capital and labor). Not only did this create policy contradictions, but it conflicted with the values of equality, rewarding productivity and efficiency that also worked against any effort to aid family farms through government policy.

Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan took on the challenge to develop new policy in light of the developing concern to save the family farm. Introduced in 1949, the Brannan Plan sought to reformulate federal agriculture policy to reduce government costs while pushing abundant production. Moreover, the plan introduced for the first time distinct policy geared toward preferring smaller (assumed to be family) farms in light of growing awareness of competition from corporate farms.⁵³ “We should be aware,” Brannan warned, “that for many years there has been a steady increase in the number of large-scale, industrialized type farming unit.”⁵⁴ Brannan took extra effort to warn, “Many of these are absent and corporate-owned.”⁵⁵ In attempting to combine these disparate goals, the Brannan Plan not only seemed unworkable, but developed considerable opposition, particularly from the Farm Bureau, for proposing policies that challenged long-held American values of rewarding maximum production and nondiscriminatory

⁵³ Farm policy before this time sought to aid all farms, not just a particular type such as the family farm. For example, the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937 was “designed to establish and maintain such orderly marketing conditions for agricultural commodities as will give such commodities a purchasing power with respect to articles in the base period prescribed in the Act.” As quoted in *The Family Farm Policy Review: Provisional Report and Tentative Recommendations* (Washington: USDA, 1951), 48. Like other New Deal farm policy, the goal was stabilization, improving rural living conditions, and aiding all farms since there was no concern of a threat from corporate farming.

⁵⁴ Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan, Reprinted from Congressional Record (April 7, 1949), 2, Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

treatment.⁵⁶ As important as saving the family farm became at this time, it nonetheless could not develop enough traction to challenge conflicting underlying values as the basis for farm policy. By July of 1949, within four months of the initial proposal, Congress voted down the Brannan Plan in favor of the more conservative Gore bill, named after Albert Gore (D-TN), which became the Agricultural Act of 1949.⁵⁷

With increasing awareness of corporate farming and the challenges it posed to smaller, family farms Secretary Brannan devised a unique formula for setting universal limits on federal aid to any one farm. To be sure, corporate farming remained a small contingent of the agricultural economy. Nonetheless, its rapid growth in the post-war years, coupled with the rising size of farms, the rapid declines in farm numbers and farm population led Americans to perceive a threat to farms that looked more like farms typical of the past. Brannan's proposal included limiting the total amount of commodities on which any one farm would receive support. Establishing such a policy proved quite difficult. The wide variety in market prices of farm commodities as well as the varying level of farm sizes among various commodity producers forced Brannan to set a limit that could work universally across farm types while yet recognizing variations in farm size across commodities. For example a typical dairy farm annually sold a much lower dollar value of product than a cotton farmer. Yet, Brannan had to keep in mind fairness and efficiency so he could not simply set a low ceiling across the board. Doing so would punish farms working at their most cost-efficient levels.

⁵⁶ James T. Bonnen, "Observations on the Changing Nature of National Agricultural Policy Decision Processes, 1946-76," *Farmers, Bureaucrats, and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture*, Trudy Huskamp Peterson, ed. (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980), 311.

⁵⁷ Edward Hughes, "Farm Policy Compromise Shaping in Senate; Anderson Will Back Flexible Price Supports," *Wall Street Journal* (July 25, 1949).

Brannan set the maximum support at 1800 units of farm production. He used a unit as a translation term to account for the wide size variation among family farms. This ceiling meant many different things to farmers of different crops. Corn farmers could receive support on 18,000 bushels, peanut farmers on 278,946 pounds, hog farmers on 136,800 pounds, dairy farmers on 622,800 pounds of milk, apple growers on 10,062 bushels, and cotton farmers on 93,888 pounds.⁵⁸ Farmers of multiple commodities could then use the unit formula to determine the total production that would receive support. Brannan, however, learned quite quickly that establishing such limits, although in the name of the family farm, created problems politically. Once established, such limits seemed quite arbitrary while also promoting discriminatory treatment within the agricultural program. So even though Brannan set such limits at “a volume high enough to benefit most farms but one which will not encourage the development of extremely large, industrialized farming,” he later backed off from such strict discriminatory numbers.⁵⁹ This retraction seems in response to the concern many had that although the plan “encourages family-type farming,” it would nonetheless unfairly provide support for some farmers but not for others.⁶⁰

Opponents of this limitation could not directly oppose a plan aimed at supporting the family farm. Arguing against such a culturally valued symbol would be politically difficult. Instead, opponents appealed to the idea of equality and painted the limitations

⁵⁸ Calculations resulting from information presented in “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan, Reprinted from the Congressional Record (April 7, 1949), 7, Box 10, Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁵⁹ “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan,” Reprinted from the Congressional Record (April 7, 1949), 3 and “House Group OK’s Trial Run for Farm Plan,” *Denver Post* (June 23, 1949), Box 12, File: Brannan Plan, Box 6 of 7, Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁶⁰ J. William Firor, “The Brannan Farm Plan,” *Georgia Business* 9 (March 1950), 7.

as a form of socialism in which lower classes received help from the government at the detriment of more wealthy, self-driven individuals.⁶¹ Even those not directly affected by the proposal could not help but notice that this 1800 unit limitation indicated Brannan “thinks [only] the big boys should take their chances.”⁶² By attempting legislation that sought to direct aid toward a more socially acceptable form of farming, the Brannan Plan brought into the policy process a new social value that, on its own, the public supported. However, in trying to delineate between socially acceptable farms, namely smaller, family farms, and unacceptable farms, namely large especially corporate farms, Brannan necessarily created a conflict between aiding the family farm and the widely held ideas of fairness and rewarding productivity and efficiency.

Compounding the conflict between aiding the family farm and the idea of fairness in government policy, Brannan’s proposal included the use of direct-income payments to farmers to make up the difference between market price and the price government leaders thought farmers ought to receive.⁶³ Direct payments represented a new policy tool created in light of the growing costs brought on by growing surpluses owned by the Federal government. Under the existing agricultural policy, when market prices fell below acceptable levels, the Federal government became a middleman: buying commodities from farmers and either selling them at a loss or holding them until market prices improved. Direct payments seemed to provide a solution by maintaining support to farmers, yet getting the government out of the supply chain, thereby reducing costs.

⁶¹ “Brannan Plan Branded Socialistic, Board Urges United Opposition,” *The Mississippi Farm Bureau News* (April 1949), found in Box 12, File: Brannan Plan, Box 6 of 7, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁶² “The Brannan Plan,” Extension of Remarks of Sidney R. Yates of the Illinois House of Representatives (October 5, 1949), Box 11, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁶³ William H. Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 125.

While seemingly beneficial and in the name of aiding the family farm, direct payments nonetheless sparked further controversy and discontent with the Brannan Plan. Under existing price supports, while more expensive to the government, farmers received support according to amount of crops sold. This policy ensured equal treatment while also rewarding efficiency; two commonly supported values. This type of subsidy, after all, did not change the impetus to find the most efficient form of production in order to capture higher profits. Direct payments with a cap, however, challenged the long-held policy goal of pushing farm production as well as the societal belief that efficient work deserves reward. Farmers were now rewarded for often choosing against the more efficient forms of production.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, America's largest farm organization, resoundingly opposed the Brannan Plan because its policy proposals countered long-established values. Throughout its history, the Farm Bureau had supported legislation that helped farmers improve their productivity. In fact, for its entire early history, the Farm Bureau had official connections to the Agricultural Extension. Moreover, the Farm Bureau had supported legislation aimed at stabilizing commodity markets and farm income. While the Farm Bureau had begun to move away from government intervention and toward a stricter laissez-faire philosophy in the years immediately before the introduction of the Brannan Plan, its reaction to the plan proved monumental in propelling the groups' shift in politics.

Until and even after the Brannan Plan, the Farm Bureau supported continued government involvement in agricultural education, market expansion and price stabilization. The cap on federal support to each farm through marketing limitations

however, enraged Farm Bureau leadership.⁶⁴ Allan Kline, Farm Bureau President, concluded that the Brannan Plan would “squeeze out the efficient producer” for the sake of aiding the less-efficient farmer.⁶⁵ For Farm Bureau members, typically the larger, more profitable farmers, a plan to limit government aid clearly did not adhere to the idea of rewarding efficiency. Beginning with opposition to the Brannan Plan and continuing in response to various proposals thereafter to save smaller, family farms, the Farm Bureau increased its lobbying efforts against such policy proposals that contradicted the basic ideas of rewarding efficiency and increasing production.

Opposition to the Brannan Plan arose from non-farmers as well. The Brannan Plan in effect would have provided a guaranteed income to farmers. Non-farmers, despite their support for the family farm, could not help but wonder why no other occupation group received such overt government aid. “If government undertakes to guarantee a satisfactory income to the producers of farm commodities,” Senator George Aiken (R-VT) asked, “can we, with a clear conscience, deny the same guarantee of satisfactory income to other groups of our population? Where can we stop?”⁶⁶ Aiken, already an opponent of the Brannan Plan, appealed to the idea of equal treatment in order to rally opposition.

Similarly, the Brannan proposal’s price guarantee to farmers, while providing stability, would also remove most of the risk involved in producing for commodity markets. A guaranteed income would encourage full production. Having full production, Brannan argued, ensured that consumers would enjoy cheap retail food prices and have

⁶⁴ Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost*, 139.

⁶⁵ William Blair, “Farm Bureau President Assails Brannan Plan as ‘Road to Tyranny,’” *New York Times* (Dec. 14, 1949).

⁶⁶ Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 1st Sess., April 7, 1949, pt. 3, 4032.

dependable food sources. Yet, in ensuring full production, the Brannan Plan also ensured continuation of surpluses which had created rising costs to government that many consumers detested as tax payers.⁶⁷ Congressman John Heselton, Representative of the 1st District of Massachusetts, wrote a letter to President Truman outlining his frustrations with inefficient policies. He noted that between June 20, 1950 and April 20, 1951, the USDA took a loss of over \$263 million all the while the nation had troops in Korea, “American housewives have been struggling to meet the increasing prices for food” “while the American taxpayers were paying the first increased tax bill.”⁶⁸

Throughout the late 1940s and into the early 1950s, the federal government periodically destroyed surplus food. It did so only after trying to unload the surplus goods in markets. However, it had to be careful when doing so because any rise in supply, such as through government sale, could lower the price; in effect only delaying the impact surpluses had on farm income. Government leaders such as Clinton Anderson and Charles Brannan faced a difficult situation from multiple angles. On one side they faced pressure from the American public, worried about food price inflation, seeking programs to increase food production. On another side Anderson and Brannan faced demand from the American public concerned about the cost of federal agricultural programs, especially costs associated with storage of surplus commodities.⁶⁹ In seeking to rally public support for the Brannan Plan, Representative Steven Pace (D-GA) noted that in the 3 years before introduction of the Brannan Plan, the government “bought \$408

⁶⁷ Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost*, 170.

⁶⁸ Representative John Heselton to President Truman, June 18, 1951, File 607, Official Files, Truman Library.

⁶⁹ In this situation the American public held incompatible concerns. As consumers they wanted low food prices, but as tax payers did not want expensive government programs that would help keep food costs low.

million worth of Irish potatoes.” Pace continued, “It has burned them, it has let them lie on the ground and rot, it has fed them to the hogs, and the American people and the American taxpayers did not get one of them.”⁷⁰ American farmers sought a continuation of Federal programs that provided a guaranteed market for their goods. But when the government had to clear storage room in order to purchase new surplus goods, they had to get rid of the surplus already sitting in storage.

To add to the difficulty, moral values against destroying food complicated the policy issue to the fullest.⁷¹ Alroma B. Jurich of Pasadena, California wrote to Mrs. Truman in response to the government burning food in January of 1950. “Such action seems to be against the teachings of the Bible,” Jurich noted.⁷² F.J. Watson of Indiana, Pennsylvania wrote to Secretary Brannan chastising him for immorally destroying food. “Man may plant and man may water, but it is God that gives the increase; and you defy him and slap Him in the face and destroy our food which he has so abundantly blessed our beloved nation.”⁷³ But for Watson and other consumers, food destruction was not only immoral, but also unfair in that it raised consumer prices while also costing taxpayers money to fund USDA programs to destroy food. Such programs, according to Watson, were “bleeding us for the money.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ “Special Number, the Brannan Plan,” *Governmental Affairs Legislative Daily* (December 5, 1949), Box 12, File: Brannan Plan, Box 6 of 7, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁷¹ President Franklin Roosevelt tried to destroy food in 1933 as part of his New Deal farm program to boost farm prices only to receive a hail of criticism from the general public.

⁷² Alroma B. Jurich to Mrs. Truman, February 14, 1950, Box 1514, File 607. Official File, Truman Library.

⁷³ F.J. Watson to Charles Brannan (May 5, 1950), Box 1514, File: 607, Official File, Truman Library.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The Brannan plan sought to mix the new policy goal of saving the family farm with established policy goals such as raising production, efficiency and raising farm income to match non-farm income. This mix resulted in contradictions that arose and helped lead to its initial defeat in 1948.⁷⁵ Attempting to run the proposal through Congress again in 1950, Secretary Brannan was cut off by the advent of the Korean War in June of that year and Republican victories in the mid-term elections. The Korean War, just as World War II, pushed food demand and, for the time being, resolved the need to artificially support farm prices.⁷⁶ In no uncertain terms the Brannan Plan had died, never to be resuscitated. The basis of the Brannan Plan, establishing policies that adhered to the values of efficiency, abundance and parity while saving the family farm, would reappear in small portions of later farm legislation. The Brannan Plan, while the first official attempt to aid the smaller, family farm over the larger, corporate farm, would not be the last.⁷⁷ Various legislative proposals cropped up through the remainder of the 20th century aimed at saving or aiding the family farm.⁷⁸ Each would face similar difficulties in meshing wide-ranging policy goals.

⁷⁵ Donald R. Kaldor and Howard H. Hines, "Goal Conflicts in Agriculture," *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 188. Kaldor and Hines note "As the Brannan Plan made clear, there are conflicts involving economic equality for agriculture, cheap food and low government expenditures for farm programs." (188)

⁷⁶ Gilbert Fite, *American Agriculture and Farm Policy Since 1900* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1964), 5.

⁷⁷ Reo Christenson, *The Brannan Plan: Farm Politics and Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), 167.

⁷⁸ Despite the rising concern with saving the family farm, farm policy leaders did not develop policy tools more capable of achieving such a goal. Instead, as will be shown in the next chapter examining Eisenhower Administration farm policy, leaders stayed tied to old policy tools because they stayed within the context of broad American values.

The Korean War not only ended price-depressing surpluses, it created inflation-driving food shortages in only a matter of months. Just as during the years of World War II and immediately following, price stabilization became a priority during the Korean conflict.⁷⁹ Inflation required the Truman Administration to enforce price controls for a period in response to consumer anger over rising food costs. In many ways the Korean War brought back price uncertainties that America had experienced during and immediately following World War II. Just as during those years, farm groups used the Korean War to justify a continuation of high fixed supports to ensure steady markets and income. The Defense Production Act of 1950 established price supports at a minimum of 100 percent of parity. The Defense Production Act Amendments of 1952 set price supports at a fixed 90 percent parity for the major commodities of wheat, corn, cotton, peanuts, rice and tobacco until 1954.⁸⁰

Just as after World War II, the Truman Administration again faced consumer wrath over rising food prices. From just June through December of 1950 consumer costs rose 4.8 percent with food rising a bit faster at 5.3 percent.⁸¹ Consumers again voiced displeasure with government policies that seemed to give favor to farmers at the cost of the rest of America. As Brannan noted, consumers believed “farmers have been given special or privileged treatment” and that “agricultural commodity prices are unreasonably or disproportionately high.”⁸² Brannan tried to dispel both of these perceptions by

⁷⁹ Dean, *An Opportunity Lost*, 229.

⁸⁰ Willard W. Cochrane and Mary E. Ryan, *American Farm Policy, 1948-1973* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1976), 141-2; and Dean, *An Opportunity Lost*, 229.

⁸¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Secretary, “Farm Prices in the Price Control Picture,” February 8, 1951, File 1, Official File, Truman Papers.

⁸² *Ibid.*

pointing out the presence of inflation across the board, not just with food. In the process of trying to make a larger point about parity, however, Brannan admitted that farm prices, while still below parity, had nonetheless “risen in recent months and are now high in relation to their own history.”⁸³ For consumers facing inflation, this provided little consolation.

Despite the consumer unrest, Secretary Brannan initiated “The Family Farm Policy Review,” in the summer of 1951. The reviewed polled millions of farm people and farm organizations about the effectiveness of federal agriculture policies in aiding specifically the family farm. Had he had the power, Brannan most likely would have expanded the survey to include all Americans. A survey conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation in 1956 indicated that the general public viewed the widespread farm problem as the second most important issue facing the nation, just after the importance of maintaining peace.⁸⁴

Just as with the Brannan Plan, the Family Farm Policy Review sought to reshape farm policy in light of the recent development of concern for the family farm. If Brannan could show considerable farm support for policies aimed at helping the family farm, much like his Brannan Plan, he could gain political clout in pushing for such policies by showing the public supported such legislation. Saving the family farm was not a goal reserved for farm people, however. Just a few years earlier, Rural Sociologist Walter Goldschmidt published a study outlining the growing differences between two similar California towns after corporate agriculture entered one, Arvin, while family-based

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Opinion Research Corporation, “Report to Business Executives: What Voters Think of the Administration...Early in the 1956 Campaign,” *Tabular Supplement* 14 n. 5 (May 1956), A-1, Box 7, File: Public Opinion Index-1956 Campaign, Citizens for Eisenhower, Eisenhower Library.

agriculture remained the dominant form in the other town, Dinuba. Goldschmidt's study concluded that corporate farming reduced community activity, education, religion, local business ownership and average family income and standard of living.⁸⁵ Goldschmidt's study set off a firestorm of discussion.

Undersecretary of Agriculture Clarence McCormick added to the Goldschmidt comparison to further differentiate the influences of corporate and family farming, but in the context of individual character and family values:

There is a sense of partnership in the operation of a family farm that is unique in modern society. Husband, wife, and children all share in the enterprise. The managing office is not in a downtown building, but in the home. Thus, the successful family farm provides an atmosphere in which family ties are likely to be particularly strong, the authority of the parents more solidly respected, and the place and responsibilities of the children more clearly defined.⁸⁶

"These contrasting conditions [between corporate and family farming]," McCormick concluded, "show plainly how and why the family farm system is a vital force in American democracy."⁸⁷

Survey reports distributed in September of 1952, a full year after initiation of the policy review, identified widespread popular support among farmers for the idea of policies directed toward aiding family farms and general pleasure with the services provided by the USDA and its various divisions or associated agencies such as the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, the Rural Electrification Administration, and the Price Support

⁸⁵ Clarence J. McCormick, "Preserving the Family Farm," (April 11, 1951), 6-7, Box 1, File: Land reform, family farm-general, 1950-52 (M-P), McCormick Papers, Truman Library.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Program.⁸⁸ One must be careful to note that such conclusions came not directly from the farmers, but were vetted by USDA staff on many levels.

The Family Farm Policy Review was more than just simply a survey, however. It was an opportunity to develop new rhetoric and justification for policy proposals such as the Brannan Plan. More importantly, it provides us insight into the inter-connections between domestic agriculture policy and the foreign policy needs of the nation within the Cold War context. Too often agricultural historians viewed farm policy isolated from other concerns or so dominant that all other factors received only secondary consideration.⁸⁹ To some extent such works are accurate. For example, President Lyndon Johnson greatly expanded the Food Stamp program primarily as a means of finding an outlet for surplus farm goods. Feeding the poor provided a secondary benefit.

We must look at farm policy formation in another way however, in order to see how other policy areas as well as the general historical context directed the path of farm policy development. Considering how slowly farm policy typically moves over time, response to an acute concern in the post-World War II years could have long-lasting effects on farm policy and, in doing so reshape the entire farm policy process.⁹⁰ In this situation, the Cold War proved an overwhelming force in shaping farm policy. We must

⁸⁸ USDA, Office of the Secretary, "USDA Releases Summary of the Family Farm Policy Review," September 11, 1952, Box 24, File: Family Farm [1 of 2], Charles Brannan Papers, Truman Library. Specifically regarding the Price Support Program, the survey report concluded most farmers desired supports raised to 100% of parity (12).

⁸⁹ Agricultural histories that provide good detail on the internal aspects of farm policy include Reo Christenson, *The Brannan Plan: Farm Politics and Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), Mark Friedberger, *Farm Families and Change in 20th Century America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988) and Robert Paarlberg and Don Paarlberg, "Agricultural Policy in the Twentieth Century," *Agricultural History* 74 (2000): 136-61.

⁹⁰ Farm policy, much like other policy areas, typically move quite slowly without the benefit of a focusing event. However, with the advent of a focusing event, policy action often responds quite quickly, as with the New Deal response to the Great Depression.

also examine material previously considered superfluous to the farm policy process to see many forces at work. Agricultural historians examining this specific era have overwhelmingly focused on the Brannan Plan while completely ignoring the Family Farm Policy Review mostly because the Review was seemingly just a simple survey, while the Brannan Plan was a tangible, revolutionary proposal.⁹¹ By considering the origins and goals of the Family Farm Policy Review we can recognize not only the importance of the developing concern to save the family farm, but the influence the Cold War had in creating this concern. In this way, we can see not only the impact a new policy goal had on farm policy and the policy process, but also a major factor in the development of that underlying policy goal.

Just after the announcement of the Family Farm Policy Review, Undersecretary of Agriculture Clarence J. McCormick wrote a letter to Senator Milton Young, (R-ND). The letter outlined the need for the policy review, especially in light of recent developments in the Cold War. “If democracy is to be a continuing source of hope to rural people elsewhere in the world,” McCormick urged, “democracy must continue to advance in our own rural areas—we must hold the mirror up to ourselves.”⁹² Still in the midst of the Korean War, Americans also recently saw the Soviets develop their own atomic bomb and China turn Red in 1949. In that time, Americans witnessed communism spread to various parts of Europe and Asia while threatening to spread to Africa and Latin America. It became obvious to political leaders that the Cold War

⁹¹ See Alan Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics During the Truman Era*, Virgil Dean, *An Opportunity Lost*, and Reo Christenson, *The Brannan Plan*.

⁹² Clarence J. McCormick to Milton R. Young, June 27, 1951, Box 1, File: Land reform-family farm-general, 1950-52 (R-Y), Clarence McCormick Papers, Truman Library.

would become a battle for the ideological allegiance of people throughout the world. As farm policy officials noted, “[Nine] persons out of 20 in the world live in underdeveloped lands. It is for their allegiance that democracy and communism are struggling today.”⁹³

Policy leaders such as McCormick scrambled to find a message they could take to nations and peoples teetering on the brink of communism to bring them solidly into the sphere of western democracy. The message had to show to the world that America not only understood, but supported domestically, the values and standard of living other nations sought. Clearly that message would include the idea of freedom. But considering the dire economic conditions many people throughout the world faced, the message also had to show the United States valued the economic success of individuals. And since most of the world was still rural, America had to show those values in its farm policy. Urging Senator Young to support the Family Farm Policy Review, Undersecretary McCormick found the message policy leaders needed to compete for the hearts and minds of millions of rural people across the globe. “During recent months it has become abundantly clear,” McCormick noted, “that our United States pattern of land tenure and family farming should be used as an American export of hope in our world-wide struggle against communist [sic] expansion.”⁹⁴

Policy leaders had found their message to take to the world. “The American family farm pattern,” Secretary Brannan explained in numerous speeches and press releases, “is an answer to communism’s false lures,” and “is one of the Nation’s main exhibits in the world struggle for men’s minds and one of the examples we hold out for

⁹³ *Family Farm Policy Review: Provisional Report and Tentative Recommendations of the Department of Agriculture’s Family Farm Policy Review Subcommittee* (Washington: USDA, 1951), 11.

⁹⁴ Clarence J. McCormick to Milton R. Young (June 27, 1951), Box 1, File: Land reform-family farm-general, 1950-52 (R-Y), McCormick Papers, Truman Library.

all the world to see.”⁹⁵ Within this Cold War struggle, the family farm became America’s answer to not only the economic difficulties many faced, but also contained the appealing concept of freedom and family values that differentiated America from the Soviet Union and its use of collective farming. Brannan continued, “We seek to extend the benefits and advantages of our system to rural populations elsewhere.”⁹⁶

Using the family farm ideal in the global Cold War was not simply a matter of informing other nations of this American concept. The reality of a global news system required that government leaders make the reality of family farms live up to the ideal projected to the world. In the context of civil rights, U.S. leaders experienced a similar need to make the domestic reality live up to the projected ideal. During the early years of the Cold War, U.S. leaders got caught projecting an image of equality and democracy while domestically the nation suffered in the midst of racial oppression, segregation and violence.⁹⁷ In discussing the family farm as a Cold War model, Secretary Brannan noted, “we should make sure that our own pattern is the best possible one.”⁹⁸

Policy leaders such as Brannan and McCormick recognized not just the international imperative, but a domestic Cold War imperative to aiding the family farm. The Cold War, after all, was not simply an international battle, but a battle at home as

⁹⁵ Charles Brannan, “The Family Farm’s Future: You Can Help Determine It,” (Washington: GPO, June 1951), 5, found in Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library; and “Better Farm Base Urged by Brannan,” *New York Times* (may 20, 1951).

⁹⁶ Charles Brannan, “The Family Farm’s Future: You Can Help Determine It,” (Washington: GPO, June 1951), 5, found in Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

⁹⁷ Works that draw the connection between the Cold War and Civil Rights include: Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁹⁸ Brannan, “The Family Farm’s Future,” 5, Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

well to suppress and destroy internal threats of communism. This called for efforts to ensure that the pure competition of capitalism did not leave millions of Americans frustrated and poverty-ridden. McCormick took Communist successes in other nations as a warning:

I think it's pretty clear from what has been happening in other countries, that if we lost our family farm system to any great extent—and if large numbers of people who once owned their farms became peasants on the land—we would soon see the rise of communism as a real threat within our own borders.⁹⁹

This was not simply hyperbole, however. Major problems developed or persisted in light of the technological revolution that threatened the stability of agriculture domestically and the capacity for U.S. leaders to sell other nations on the American agricultural system embodied in the family farm. With the advent of post-war agricultural technology, corporate farming grew as a form of agricultural production. Popular perceptions of corporate farming and its growth portrayed it as a destroyer of the family farm. If U.S. officials were to sell other nations on American agriculture they would have to address and even restrain the negative influence corporate agriculture had on society, namely the detriment to the local economy, education, strong moral values and community life. Officials would also have to aid family farms so that the nation, in the midst of the Cold War, could benefit from the social benefits such farms provided while also supporting this image and ideal to sell to other nations to pull potential allies into the western sphere.

Even though average farm income had progressed somewhat after World War II, the reality remained that millions of rural people still had low income and suffered in living conditions woefully behind the standard of living of urban America. “Despite

⁹⁹ Clarence J. McCormick, “The Strength of Our Democracy,” Speech given at Des Moines, Iowa, January 10, 1951, Box 2, File: OF 1, Official File, Truman Library. This rationale is also noted by William H. Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 196.

immense progress in bringing electricity to the farms,” Undersecretary McCormick explained, “only about one-fourth as many farm families as urban families, proportionate to population, have the combination of electric lights, running water, flush toilet, bathtub or shower, and installed cooking facilities.”¹⁰⁰ McCormick concluded that, “Unless farming can be maintained as a good way of life, as a satisfying human experience, the family farm is doomed.”¹⁰¹

In light of this problem, farm policy leaders called for “adequately sized” family farms that would “provide a comfortable living for a family.”¹⁰² In effect, farm leaders called for growth in farm size to allow farms to provide an income that would support the family in a reasonable standard of living. Moreover, the family farm, in order to meet family needs through improved income, required “operating efficiency.”¹⁰³ In effect, the ideal of the family farm had to adhere to broader societal values of productivity and efficiency in order for it to become a truly American institution.¹⁰⁴ The Family Farm Policy Review was designed to reform farm programs to better aid the family farm “to more efficiently and successfully carry on its farming enterprise.”¹⁰⁵ Family farms that failed to provide reasonable income could not be used to sell other nations on this

¹⁰⁰ Clarence McCormick, “Preserving the Family Farm,” unpublished first draft, April 11, 1951, 10, Box 1, File: Land reform-family farm-general, 1950-52 (M-P), McCormick Papers, Truman Library.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Charles Brannan, “The Family Farm’s Future,” 3, Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library; and Theodore W. Schultz, *Production and Welfare of Agriculture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 17. Schultz noted the popularly held assumption that improved efficiency would improve farm incomes.

¹⁰⁴ Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 142.

¹⁰⁵ McCormick to Senator Homer Ferguson, September 26, 1951, Box 1, File: Land reform-family farm-general, 1950-52 (F), McCormick Papers, Truman Library.

American ideal and in fact such farms had to “maintain a standard of adequacy and efficiency” “to justify continued national support and encouragement.”¹⁰⁶

With the completion of the Family Farm Policy Review in the fall of 1952, the Truman Administration had developed a list of policy goals that took a number of different paths toward saving the family farm. Most of the proposals aimed at helping farm families expand their farm to adequately support the families or proposed to increase federal aid to farms through increased research or direct financial help. Coupled with basic Truman Administration farm policy tools of parity, price supports and storage of surplus commodities, the Family Farm Policy Review proposals represent an odd approach to saving the family farm. In the name of saving the family farm, the Policy Review proposals and long-standing agricultural policy tools suggested or perpetuated a number of ideas that would aid all agricultural types, not just family farms, turn some family farms into unacceptable large farms, or outright aid corporate farms over smaller, family farms.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, the same policy proposals aimed at aiding family farms would, in many cases, aggravate the problems family farms faced. For example, surplus production had continued to drag down market prices for farm commodities. Nonetheless, Brannan proposed increasing land reclamation projects that would bring more land into production. Other programs worked against one another. The Department of Agriculture continued a policy of subsidizing fertilizer production that raised farm output while

¹⁰⁶ Charles Brannan, “The Family Farm’s Future,” 4, Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

¹⁰⁷ Some specific proposals from the Family Farm Policy Review that would aid corporate farms over family farms include raising acreage allotments and marketing quotas, conservation payments, and increasing the limit on individual water-facilities loans from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000.

continuing acreage allotments in order to cut production.¹⁰⁸ Price supports maintained in the name of aiding the family farm ensured profit on farm products, causing increased production which then only aggravated the surplus problem.¹⁰⁹ Price supports caused further problems. While providing security to family farms, price supports would provide the same security to larger corporate farms in proportion to the amount of commodities produced, only accentuating the differing economies of scale that made larger or corporate farms more competitive than smaller, typically family farms.¹¹⁰

With the family farm receiving such heightened attention due to Cold War concerns and corporate competition, one has to ask three questions. First, why did agricultural policy officials continue to use tools or propose new ones that clearly were ineffective in meeting the rhetorical purpose? Second, why didn't policy leaders pursue policy tools more effective in achieving the stated goal of aiding the family farm facing growing competition from corporate farms? And third, if saving the family farm was so important to most Americans, why was the Brannan Plan defeated so quickly?

A simple, albeit incorrect answer to all of these questions is that policy leaders actually did not want to preserve the family farm. Instead, they sought to disguise corporate-friendly policies in family farm rhetoric either for the economic gain of friends and political allies or because they truly believed that corporate farming adhered to the

¹⁰⁸ T.W. Schultz, "Homesteads in Reverse," *Farm Policy Forum* (Summer 1956), 13.

¹⁰⁹ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 148.

¹¹⁰ Norman F. Keiser, "The American Farm Problem and Public Policy," *Social Science* 32 n. 1 (January 1957), 10; Robert A. Rohwer, "Family Farming as a Value," *Rural Sociology* 16 (1951), 338; Reo M. Christenson, *The Brannan Plan: Farm Politics and Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), 105; and Theodore W. Schultz, *Production and Welfare of Agriculture* (New York: the MacMillan Co., 1948), 183 where he noted that "the price-making mechanism is not an appropriate apparatus for lessening the inequality in the personal distribution of income."

idea of progress towards efficiency and rational production techniques.¹¹¹ Political leaders, like the population they represented, truly believed in the agrarian myth. And when corporate agriculture and the Cold War developed after World War II, the family farm became the modern ideal of the agrarian myth; one facing considerable challenges and a reality of technological revolution and massive off-farm migration. Before the post-World War II period, family farming provided the only considerable type of agricultural production and hence was considered the most efficient form. Under that set of circumstances policy goals were well aligned. When corporate farming grew in the post-war period it presented a more cost-efficient form of production, creating serious conflict between the goals of economic efficiency and perpetuating the cultural heritage of farming.¹¹²

To better explain why policy leaders such as Charles Brannan and Clarence McCormick continued to use the tools of support prices, parity and surplus commodity storage and to explain the lack of popular support for the Brannan Plan we need to consider the underlying societal values that determined policy goals and tools. While saving the family farm became a newly stated and politically popular policy of the Federal government under the Truman Administration, agricultural policy continued to pursue older goals, namely efficiency, increased production and improved rural living

¹¹¹ Some that have argued this include: William P. Browne, et al, *Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 15; and Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 4.

¹¹² Dale Hathaway, "Policy Conflicts Relating to the Economic Organization of Agriculture," *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 175; and John M. Brewster, "Society Values and Goals in Respect to Agriculture," *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 114. Ingolf Vogeler noted that "efficiency is usually associated with large-scale farm operations and inefficiency with small-scale farms." *The Myth of the Family Farm*, 93.

standards. As agricultural economist Willard Cochrane noted, “Policies are formulated and pursued to yield results that are highly valued.”¹¹³

These policy goals and tools fit well with overarching societal values of improving people’s standard of living, particularly through improved productivity and economic stability, dependence on technology and reduction of laborious tasks.¹¹⁴ Moreover, overarching societal values required farm policy goals and tools to adhere to the idea that work and productivity ought to be rewarded, all should have equal opportunity to produce as much as possible, and that less dependence on government is better.¹¹⁵ Similarly, the belief in technology required farm policies to value continuous progress in farm technology adoption as a solution to farm problems. “Americans prize technological advance,” observed Willard Cochrane, “and demand it in all segments of the economy.”¹¹⁶ Acceptable farm policy would have to value technology. Tying policy that rewarded technology and productivity to policy aimed at saving the family farm would be difficult.

Considering both the established nature of price supports, parity, and commodity storage, all of which adhered to overarching societal values, creating specific policies aimed at saving the family farm would not only require creating new policy tools, but

¹¹³ Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality*, 119.

¹¹⁴ Dale Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture: Public Policy in a Democratic Society* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), 10; Earl O. Heady and Lee G. Burchinal, “The Concern with Goals and Values in Agriculture,” *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), 9; and Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality*, 106. Cochrane noted the three principles of the American creed that shape policy: belief in enterprise, belief in democracy and belief in technology. (106)

¹¹⁵ Dale Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture*, 15; G.E. Brandow, “Goals in Agricultural Policy,” *Farm Policy Forum* 12 n. 4 (1959-60), 3-4; Milton C. Hallberg, *Policy for American Agriculture: Choices and Consequences* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1992), 8; and Henry Abraham, “Agricultural Price Supports,” *Social Science* (January 1955), 28.

¹¹⁶ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 99 and 105.

tools that would have to contradict overarching societal values in order for them to truly save the family farm. For example, Brannan's proposal of a cap on government aid to any one farm would have created a policy tool that would have ably directed support toward typically smaller, family farms and away from the larger, less socially acceptable corporate farms. However, such a policy tool would also effectively reward less-efficient farmers. Discussing this concern for family farming in relation to other values, sociologist Robert A. Rohwer noted:

The future of family type farming does not depend upon how much people prize family farming in an absolute sense. It depends on the willingness of farmers and nonfarmers to value farming more than they prize competing values.¹¹⁷

The fact that a farm policy tool such as caps on government aid has continued to receive consideration, but never outright passage, through the remainder of the 20th century and into the 21st shows policy leaders have considered it an effective tool to aiding the family farm, but not so worthwhile as to prioritize over rewarding efficiency, production and the adoption of technology.¹¹⁸ In this regard, the established tools of price supports and federal storage programs, while ineffective in saving a particular type of agriculture, nonetheless adhered to societal values of rewarding production and efficiency and therefore became the only truly acceptable policy tools.

Price supports, in particular, became the preferred policy means of propping up the family farm because they received relatively high support from farmers and nonfarmers alike.¹¹⁹ Farmers actually preferred price supports over direct aid, a tool that

¹¹⁷ Robert A. Rohwer, "Family Farming as a Value," *Rural Sociology* 16 (1951), 339.

¹¹⁸ Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture*, 61.

¹¹⁹ Donald Kaldor and Howard H. Hines, "Goal Conflicts in Agriculture," *Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy*, 189.

offered more success to achieving the goal of saving the family farm. Farmers, like other groups of society, had long valued productivity and work and believed that such should be rewarded. When presented with the opportunity to receive direct aid through the Brannan Plan many farmers turned it down.¹²⁰ They felt guilty about receiving aid without producing a product and did not want it to seem like a free handout.¹²¹ Direct payments rewarded farmers to not grow food, which to farmers seemed like a waste of resources.¹²² On the other side, consumers, while having some problems with price supports, nonetheless viewed them as a fair policy tool that adhered to other values.¹²³ In particular, price supports did not restrict the use of technology which was quickly reducing retail food prices. Price supports also became the means to achieving the concept of parity. Secretary Brannan noted this popular support when discussing parity. “This is undoubtedly valid as a concept and as a long-range objective which we accept as such.”¹²⁴ Finally, all believed price supports would provide stability in agriculture and hence would help grow the entire economy.¹²⁵

Limited by the popular belief in technology, efficiency, and reward for one’s work, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower found price supports as the only widely

¹²⁰ Periodically the USDA held farmer-only referendums on policy options such as opting between little support tied to no acreage restrictions vs. direct support coupled with acreage controls. Often the results showed overwhelming farm support for little support coupled with few production restrictions.

¹²¹ Henry Abraham, “Agricultural Price Supports,” *Social Science* (January 1955), 28.

¹²² Dale Hathaway and Lawrence W. Witt, “Agricultural Policy: Whose Valuations?” *Journal of Farm Economics* 34 (August 1952), 306.

¹²³ Reo Christenson, *The Brannan Plan: Farm Politics and Policy*, 101.

¹²⁴ “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan,” Reprinted from the Congressional Record (April 7, 1949), found in Box 10, Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

¹²⁵ Dale Hathaway, *Government and Agriculture: Public Policy in a Democratic Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 65-66.

acceptable policy tool that could be manipulated by government officials to help save the now sacrosanct American institution of the family farm in the midst of the Cold War. As the agricultural revolution continued into the Eisenhower Years, farm numbers began their most precipitous drop in American history, the cost-price squeeze intensified, corporate farming continued to grow and Cold War concerns persisted. By 1952, few questioned the goal of saving the family farm.¹²⁶ And yet, policy solutions were not easily found. Americans may have valued the idea of the family farm, but they also valued progress, technology, efficiency, return on production, and fairness in government policies that severely hindered or prevented any serious effort aimed at saving the family farm.

As public concern grew for the family farm and various price support methods failed to stem the decline of farm numbers, demand grew for an explanation as to why the farm problem persisted and government policies failed to solve it.¹²⁷ Yet, Americans' widespread belief in technology, efficiency and rewarding one's work prohibited an objective examination of problems brought on by the farm technology revolution, adding another challenge to the policy process. Frustrated by the seeming lack of power to stop the decline of the family farm, policy leaders intensified their debate over the specifics of price supports. The dramatic rise in agricultural program costs heightened the sense of frustration. Quickly after the end of the Korean War, and with farm productivity rising rapidly with new technology, USDA annual costs rose from around \$1 billion to almost

¹²⁶ Clarence J. McCormick to Senator Homer Ferguson, September 26, 1951, Box 1, File: Land reform-family farm-general, 1950-52 (F), McCormick Papers, Truman Library. McCormick noted, "Both political parties...have clearly affirmed their belief in the family farm enterprise."

¹²⁷ Fite, *American Agriculture and Farm Policy* (New York: the MacMillan Co., 1964), 24.

\$10 billion.¹²⁸ The Eisenhower Administration inherited a nearly impossible situation. The public yearned for government action to save the family farm, yet was unwilling to accept truly effective policies that addressed all of the problems facing the family farm.

¹²⁸ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Modern American Presidency* (Longman Press, 1983), 106.

Farm Policy during the Eisenhower Years

In 1956, as the nation geared up for another presidential election, the Opinion Research Corporation compiled eye-opening public opinion data regarding popular concerns. This poll acted as an evaluation of President Eisenhower as he initiated his campaign for re-election bid against the Democratic challenger, Adlai Stevenson. The results of this survey of 1,543 respondents speak volumes about the wide-spread concern for family farms as well as frustration with farm policy. In the shadows of two recent wars and facing continued Cold War tensions, Americans placed war and peace at the top of their list of concerns. Perhaps surprising to many 20th century or post-World War II historians, the farm problem received the second highest number of responses, besting segregation and race issues. The rapid decline in farm numbers and the rural-to-urban migration furthermore garnered more concern than taxes, the economy, education, inflation and threats of internal communism¹

Not only did Americans consider the farm problem, particularly the loss of family farms, to be the largest internal national problem, the public overwhelmingly perceived utter failure on the part of the Eisenhower administration to successfully or even adequately address the problems in agriculture. Only four percent of respondents to the

¹ Opinion Research Corporation, *Report to Business Executives: What Voters Think of the Administration...Early in the 1956 Campaign: Tabular Supplement* 14 n. 5 (May 1956), A-1, Box 7, File: Public Opinion Index-1956 Campaign, Citizens for Eisenhower Records, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereafter Eisenhower Library). William M. Blair, "Farmers Get Hearing on Their Grievances," *New York Times* (Nov. 6, 1955) also noted that the focus "is upon the farm economic situation."

1956 survey believed Eisenhower farm policies were working or had even improved the farm program over that provided by the Truman Administration.² Conversely, respondents to the survey overwhelmingly concluded that Eisenhower's handling of farm policies stood as his biggest failure. Thirty-one percent believed Eisenhower's farm policies "have not reduced farm surpluses; haven't helped farmers...have let the farmers down and have taken the initiative away from him by subsidies" and that "farm legislation is not strict enough."³ Eisenhower's handling of foreign affairs (11 percent) and handling of integration (9 percent) both received considerably less criticism.⁴

The Opinion Research Corporation survey not only indicates the extent of concern about the farm problem and policy failure to correct its many problems, it provides insight into the conflicting view of various solutions and just how limited policy solutions were in addressing the farm problem. Asking specifically what respondents disapproved of in Eisenhower's handling of farm issues, 28 percent stated government policy was not doing enough to bring farm income up to urban levels, 12 percent believed policies favored large scale (read corporate) farms, 11 percent believed policies imposed too many limitations and controls on farmers while 9 percent believed government policies wrongly contributed to surpluses. The mix of responses suggests no clearly defined solution. These survey results indicate policy solutions couched in ideals of parity, but also concern of discrimination. Similarly, people believed there to be too much government control, but yet too much surplus production from not enough

² Opinion Research Corporation, *Report to Business Executives: What Voters Think of the Administration...Early in the 1956 Campaign: Tabular Supplement* 14 n. 5 (May 1956), A-4, Box 7, File: Public Opinion Index-1956 Campaign, Citizens for Eisenhower Records, Eisenhower Library.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

government control or restriction of output. Further indicative of the contradictory ideals of farm policy, 11 percent of respondents opposed subsidies to farmers for not producing while 9 percent believed the government did nothing substantive to help farmers.⁵ In other words, the government provided too much help while failing to provide adequate help.

The historical context of the farm situation in the 1950s helps explain the problem of ineffective or inconsistent farm policies. That decade experienced a continuation and intensification of the post-war agricultural revolution. The 1950s saw the largest off-farm migration in American history in both gross numbers and as a percentage of the national population. In that decade, farm population fell from around 25 million to just over 15 million, a loss of almost 40 percent. The first four years of the decade, from 1950 to 1954, saw a larger decline in farm numbers than the 20 preceding years.⁶ The start of the decade saw farmers owning more animals for field crop production than tractors. By the end of the decade, tractors had so overwhelmingly replaced animal power that the USDA did not even bother taking the time to count the few field animals that remained in use in 1960. Boosted by international fears through the Cold War and a foreign policy imperative to display to the world America's advantages over the Soviet Union, the quickened pace of family farm loss in the 1950s seemed all the more worrisome. President Eisenhower and Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, as well as a number of Congressional committees, looked for explanations and solutions.

Moreover, in the 1950s farm size had experienced its largest increase over any 10-year period, growing from 216 acres to over 300 acres. With that size increase, farms

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "House Units Asks Family Farm Aid," New York Times (April 3, 1956).

had become more dependent on technology than ever before. While farm labor had fallen by over half since the 1930s, machinery inputs had risen 2.5 times and fertilizer applications rose 5 times the amount used in the 1930s. In the seven years between 1947 and 1954, fertilizer use tripled.⁷ The availability of new farm technology allowed corporate farming to expand beyond labor limitations. This technology, coupled with relatively low land prices and government policies that prevented farm commodity price collapse pulled corporations into agriculture at unprecedented rates.⁸ The fear of post-war economic recession of the late 1940s gave way to a belief in continued economic growth, fueling corporate interest in agriculture.⁹

All of these developments led to considerable corporate intrusion into agriculture, only fueling American fears of industrial concentration and loss of family farms.¹⁰ A survey by the USDA in 1968 showed that most corporations involved in farming at that time had taken root after 1950.¹¹ In 1957, John Davis and Ray Goldberg coined the term “agribusiness” to describe the growing corporatization as well as vertical and horizontal integration of the food industry.¹² By the middle of the 1950s, journalists created a cottage industry outlining both the technological changes occurring in farming and the

⁷ *Economic Report of the President, Transmitted to the Congress*, Appendix B, section III: Agriculture (Jan. 20, 1960), 103-4, Box 17, File: President Eisenhower’s Statements on Agriculture (1), Ezra Taft Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁸ Philip M. Raup, “Corporate Farming in the United States,” *Journal of Economic History* 33 (1970), 278-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Jon Lauck, *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly: The Political Economy of Grain Belt Farming, 1953-1980* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 5.

¹¹ John L. Shover, *First Majority-Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 165.

¹² John H. Davis and Roy Goldberg, *A Concept of Agribusiness* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1957).

trend toward corporate farms. One example includes an article, “Large Iowa Farm Typifies a Trend,” written by Donald Janson for the *New York Times*. In it, Janson described Brenton Farms, a corporate farm that raised 6,000 hogs on 5,000 acres. Brenton Farms implemented the most recent scientific and technological developments and required an investment of over one million dollars. Like any other corporation, Brenton Farms held annual stockholder meetings and paid dividends on shares.¹³ With considerable capital sources and economies of scale, Brenton Farms maintained its income in the late 1950s and early 1960s while many farms, particularly smaller family farms, experienced a tightening of the cost-price squeeze.

With Charles Brannan’s Family Farm Policy Review, farm policy had recently become directed toward the continuation of family farming. Achieving this farm policy goal had proven a failure on a number of levels. As noted, family farm numbers declined while corporate farms rose.¹⁴ Average farm income, while experiencing growth through the post-war period, had nonetheless failed not only to achieve parity, but also to keep up with the rate of growth experienced by non-farm workers. All of this occurred as federal farm programs created over-production of farm commodities that led to massive government surpluses which not only created further downward pressure on farm income, but created considerable costs to the federal government. By the mid 1950s, the USDA spent over \$1.5 million per day on storage fees for all of these unused crops. By the mid 1950s not only had government policy failed to achieve the stated goal of saving family

¹³ Donald Janson, “Large Iowa Farm Typifies a Trend,” *New York Times* (April 2, 1961).

¹⁴ The specific number of corporate farms at this time cannot be determined due to a lack of historical data. However, the important point is not the specific number, but a popular perception that corporate farming was growing fast and threatening the survival of family farms.

farms, it racked up billions of dollars in bills in that failed effort.¹⁵ This failure amidst considerable cost led to wide-spread criticism of farm policy, as seen in the 1956 survey by the Opinion Research Corporation.

Oddly enough, President Eisenhower, in his 1954 farm message to Congress, clearly noted at least an inconsistency in policy, if not a policy failure, that led to the popular frustration.

The chief beneficiaries of our price support policies have been the two million larger, highly mechanized farming units which produce about 85 percent of our agricultural output. The individual production of the remaining farms, numbering about 3,500,000 is so small that the farmer derives little benefit from price supports.¹⁶

President Eisenhower admitted what many had already known; that price supports created an unsettling trend of considerable government aid to large corporate farms. Secretary Benson noted in 1953 that two North Dakota wheat farms garnered Commodity Credit Corporation loans of \$127,281 and \$84,935. This stood in stark contrast to the state average wheat farm loan of \$2,890.¹⁷ In subsequent speeches, Secretary Benson noted that the largest cotton loan in California totaled over one and a quarter million dollars and the largest crop loan in Missouri was \$643,993.¹⁸

Despite the general awareness of the high costs of price supports and failure to reach the policy target, namely smaller family farms, the farm policy debate during the

¹⁵ Gilbert Fite, *American Agriculture and Farm Policy Since 1900* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 24.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Toward a Realistic Farm Program* (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1957), 165. Also quoted in Edward Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1963), 18.

¹⁷ Ezra Taft Benson, "Looking Towards a New Farm Program," Address at the Farm and Home Show, Grand Forks, North Dakota (April 1, 1954), 12, Box 1, File: speeches: April 1954-June 1954 (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

¹⁸ Ezra Taft Benson, "A Better Program—Farmers Deserve It," speech #11 to the Farmers Union (No Date), Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

1950s overwhelmingly centered on whether fixed or flexible price supports would better meet farm policy goals.¹⁹ The 1956 survey by the Opinion Research Corporation, in pursuing the undeniable popular frustration with farm policy to save the family farm, asked only one question regarding policy options. “Assuming the government will keep some type of price supports for farmers, which do you think is better—Fixed supports or flexible supports which go up or down depending on how much is produced?” Overwhelmingly survey respondents supported flexible supports that could be adjusted down if commodity supplies rose.²⁰

Similarly, the policy debate surrounding agriculture during the 1952 and 1956 presidential elections focused almost entirely on fixed versus flexible price supports. This is an interesting development considering the many similarities in the planks of the two major political parties.²¹ The Democratic Party believed support for the family farm would best be achieved through increased production, price and income stabilization policies, increasing federal agricultural research, expanding the production of small farms into fully productive farm units, expanding surplus removal programs and improving

¹⁹ As a reminder, those farm policy goals included: saving the family farm, stabilizing the farm economy, providing equitable or non-discriminatory policy, and rewarding efficiency and productivity.

²⁰ Opinion Research Corporation, *Report to Business Executives: What Voters Think* (May 1956), A-25, Box 7, File: Public Opinion Index-1956 Campaign, Citizens for Eisenhower Records, Eisenhower Library. Of 1543 survey respondents, 19% supported fixed supports, 63% supported flexible supports, and 18% did not know. The numbers became more divided when one looks at farm respondents’ answers. Of 108 farmers surveyed, 41% supported fixed supports while 51% supported flexible supports. (A-25)

²¹ As a side note, a search for “family farm” in presidential documents available in the American Presidency Project through the University of California-Santa Barbara revealed that the first presidential use of the term came on June 4, 1948 by President Truman in a speech in Chicago to the Swedish Pioneer Centennial Association. The first use of the term in a State of the Union Address came on January 5, 1949, again by President Truman. The first use of the term “family farm” in a major party platform occurred in the 1952 Democratic platform. The Republicans followed in 1956. See the American Presidency Project, accessed Sept. 26, 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php>

rural living conditions.²² Republican Party planks called for increased production, increasing markets for commodities, more Federal agricultural research, expansion of surplus removal programs and to remove government restrictions on production.²³ If these goals sound similar, they were. Both parties believed in expanding research, production, surplus removal and markets while also removing destabilizing factors such as economic collapse brought on by natural disasters and sudden downturns in commodity markets. The only truly debated difference involved price supports. Democrats argued that flexible supports allowed for the death of smaller family farms by allowing the market price to fall to levels that caused bankruptcy. Republicans argued that fixed price supports went predominantly to large farms that not only did not need the aid, but in fact made survival more difficult for the smaller, less productive family farms. As Secretary Benson noted in arguing for a shift to flexible price supports, “Operators of family-sized farms receive comparatively little help from the present program.”²⁴ Both criticisms stood correct.

While the debate over fixed versus flexible price supports in the post-war period is interesting and telling of the difficulty of solving the farm problem, particularly saving the family farm, there is a larger and much more important policy lesson. Despite broad popular concern with saving the family farm and the perception that established farm policies failed to achieve that goal, farm policy nonetheless continued down the same policy path of pushing agricultural research, surplus removal outlets and some form of

²² 1952 Democratic Platform. Available at the American Presidency Project, Accessed Sept. 26, 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/us/index.php?pid=29600>.

²³ 1956 Republican Platform. Available at the American Presidency Project, Accessed Sept. 26, 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25838>.

²⁴ “A Better Program—Farmers Deserve It,” Speech #11 to the National Farmers Union, undated, Box 5, Roll 1, box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

price stabilization, with slight incremental adjustments in each area.²⁵ One must ask, if saving the family farm was so important and Americans perceived farm policy as having failed to achieve that goal, then why didn't political leaders pursue new policies that would have more effectively addressed the problems specifically faced by family farms?²⁶ As noted earlier, some have argued that corporate interests had taken hold of the political process, ensuring that farm policies benefited them.²⁷ It was not that simple, however. Agribusiness corporations, while a growing influence, nonetheless were still young and relatively small. It was highly unlikely that they could have exerted such influence yet.²⁸ Moreover, such an answer does not explain a key fact of the farm policy process.

While Americans believed in saving the family farm and became frustrated with existing federal farm policies, Americans nonetheless offered little support for revolutionary policies that would have potentially been more effective at saving the family farm in the post-World War II era such as placing limits on farm size, prohibiting corporations from farm or farmland ownership, or freezing agricultural research to stop

²⁵ One can get a sense of the popular concern for family farms and the widespread belief in the ineffectiveness of farm policies in saving the family farm in the Opinion Research Corporation, *What Voters Think* (May 1956), A-4, A-5, Box 7, File: Public Opinion Index-1956 Campaign, Citizens for Eisenhower Records, Eisenhower Library.

²⁶ Another way of asking this question is: why weren't other policy solutions pursued at this time considering the broad awareness of a problem and the failure of established policies to address the issues? Granted, this is a counterfactual question, but one that must be asked. In studying policy development it is a vital question to ask in understanding why particular policy choices were made over others.

²⁷ Another scholar to make that argument is John L. Shover, *First-Majority-Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 236.

²⁸ By the 1990s, agribusiness firms such as Tyson or Smith Farms had achieved a level of vertical or horizontal integration that allowed them considerable market influence. Under such conditions and with considerable resources, these firms could and did influence the policy making and implementation process, especially in the area of market regulation through the Securities and Exchange Commission.

the farm technology treadmill.²⁹ In the midst of the agricultural revolution and fully aware of its consequences by 1956, Americans saw the farm problem as the second most important problem facing the nation, just after avoiding war. Moreover, Americans perceived Eisenhower's handling of the farm situation as its biggest failure. And yet, the only considerable policy debate to occur focused on fixed versus flexible price supports?

How does one explain this mix of overwhelming popular concern, yet lack of effective policy action? Key to understanding this discrepancy, as well as to understanding the policy process itself, one must consider the role of problem definition, one of the earliest stages in the policy process. Before potential solutions are created and debated, policy leaders must determine the problem requiring government action. As simple as this step may seem, it shapes the entire policy process. The problem definition process separates acceptable problems that do not require policy solutions from problems requiring immediate or considerable attention. Moreover, defining a problem stipulates the types of policy solutions pursued. In other words, problem definition involves the power to not only include, but exclude. Policy leaders active in the problem definition process had the power to define situations as one type of a problem rather than another and similarly had the power to pursue a particular group of policy solutions over another group. From this first step the policy process can follow widely varying policy paths.

With the impact of the agricultural revolution fully realized by the 1950s, the public clamored for new policies that would focus government policies more toward

²⁹ An argument related to this issue has recently developed in the agricultural history field. In *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), Virgil Dean concluded that the reason for lack of effective or new farm policy in a period of abundance is the disorganization and ineffectiveness of political leaders in the Truman Administration to seize an opportunity. This assumes without evidence or justification that Americans would have offered wide support for new and revolutionary policies. Moreover, it fails to consider the political process within a context of wider historical events or popular values.

aiding family farms. The impetus for this push became even more considerable as the public gained knowledge of large farming entities, many of them corporate, grossly benefiting from government price support programs, an egregious misuse and abuse of federal programs, while smaller, family farms disappeared at record rates.³⁰ By the 1950s, Congress was seeking ways to save the family farm while citizens and academics proposed numerous solutions.³¹ A common theme throughout many Congressional hearings was a call for farm policy that aimed “to retain and strengthen the family farm system.”³² Yet most of these solutions to saving the family farm adhered to more dominant societal values such as rewarding productivity and efficiency while rewarding investment in agriculture on par with investment and capital expenditures in other business sectors.³³

Finding a family-farm centered policy proved much more difficult than many expected. In establishing a new policy objective, farm policy leaders and the general public, for that matter, had to find explanations for why farm policy failed to stem the loss of family farms. In other words, they had to define the problem which old policies failed to solve and new policy solutions would hopefully address. But again, as much as

³⁰ For detailed information on the decline of small farms and growth of corporate farms see charts located in the appendix.

³¹ A short list of primary sources on government hearings and policy proposals from the late 1950s and early 1960s includes: Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Family Farms, *Family-Size Farms*, 84th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1956); Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1960); Marshall Harris and Robert A. Rowher, *Family Farming: An Agriculture Committee Report* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1957); Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Family Farms, *Family Farm Program*, November 14 and 15, 1957 (Washington: GPO, 1958).

³² Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., Washington: GPO, 1960), 478.

³³ *Ibid.*

saving the family farm became a considerable policy imperative, the policies suggested to address such would none the less have to adhere to established societal values.

In the area of farm policy, the years of the Eisenhower presidency are characterized by numerous efforts to resolve underlying or inherent problems in agriculture which made survival difficult for many family farms. Secretary Benson developed a number of policies aimed at increasing markets for U.S. farm products, improving farm productivity and reducing surpluses through research, product development and foreign and domestic aid programs. Benson also focused federal attention on ensuring some price stability within a larger free market context while reducing government barriers that prevented farmers from maximum production. And yet, these various policies nonetheless continued or even exacerbated the difficulties smaller family farmers faced at this time. We can attribute the particular policy path to the influence of societal values, particularly at the problem definition stage.

In outlining what he saw as the major problems causing considerable difficulty for family farmers, Secretary Benson defined the problem, or in this case problems, in a particular way as to dictate the direction of policy. Benson noted that huge surpluses depressed commodity prices as well as pushed the cost of maintaining government farm programs to an all-time high, that farm people were caught in a cost-price squeeze, that half of all farms had a gross income under \$2,500 per year and that government acreage allotments prevented many farmers from efficient production.³⁴ This problem definition of the farm problem was quite popular. By effectively blaming inefficient production, the lack of markets and government regulation limiting production, Benson defined the

³⁴ Benson speech at the Annual Farmer-Businessman Dinner, Chamber of Commerce Agricultural Bureau and Linn County Farm Bureau, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (May 21, 1959), 3. Box 4, File: Speeches, April 1958-October 1959 (2), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

problem within established societal values. In doing so he made public acceptance of his various policy solutions much easier. Benson, like most Americans, overlooked technological changes and old policies based on ideas of stability, increased production and improved efficiency as at least a few of the root causes of the post-war farm problem.

Foremost among Benson's definition of the various problems in agriculture was the lack of viable markets for the expanded production of American farmers. Ever since European recovery after World War II and the reorganization of Soviet agriculture into collectives as a means of funding industrial development, U.S. farmers faced increased international market competition in their quest to unload their products. This task became proportionally more difficult as U.S. farm productivity increased, on average, over four percent per year in the post-war era. In other words, U.S. farmers not only faced increased competition, they had to sell more products just to avoid the buildup of price-depressing surpluses. Increased production resulting from new seed, fertilizer, chemical and mechanical technologies pushed total agricultural production up each year throughout the 1950s, despite having fewer acres in production. By 1959, U.S. agricultural production was a full 25 percent above the 1947 to 1949 average.³⁵

Within a context of rising farm production and rising government costs associated with supporting low farm prices, President Eisenhower and Secretary Benson had to find ways of removing surpluses. Their policy solution options were limited by the widespread belief that food should never be destroyed. They had learned the history lessons from Roosevelt and Truman farm policies that had periodically destroyed food to raise farm prices, but with much public outcry. Society demanded that food, once

³⁵ *Economic Report of the President, Transmitted to the Congress* Jan. 20, 1960, 100, Box 17, File: President Eisenhower's Statements on Agriculture (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

created, be used purposefully. Many believed the destruction of food was a sin.³⁶

Furthermore, the Cold War loomed heavy on everyone's minds. So heavy, in fact, that it injected another issue into policy development in almost every area, including agriculture.

Facing such policy limitations, President Eisenhower pushed through Congress the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, also known as the Food for Peace Program or Public Law 480. Food for Peace outlined two major objectives, to increase consumption of U.S. agricultural commodities in foreign countries and to improve the foreign relations of the United States.³⁷ The emphasis of PL 480 stood squarely on the first objective; however any foreign policy benefits clearly were not simply secondary results, particularly within the Cold War context. Food for Peace was designed to address commodity surplus issues, but also to gain allies in the third world.³⁸

Initially authorized with a \$1 billion spending limit over its first three years, PL 480 bought surplus commodities from the Commodity Credit Corporation, then either donated the food to nations in need or sold it to obtain foreign currency which would then be used for economic development in the receiving nation.³⁹ President Eisenhower and Secretary Benson prided themselves on the twin successes of the Food for Peace Program. In its first six years, the program exported \$6.5 billion in surplus commodities

³⁶ Discussion of the moral opposition to food destruction as a surplus removal program can be found in chapter 2.

³⁷ *Public Law 480-83rd Congress: Chapter 469-2d Session. S.2475*, found in Box 11, File: Food-For-Peace (1), Don Paarlberg Records, Eisenhower Library. The purpose of the law was stated as “an Act to increase the consumption of United States agricultural commodities in foreign countries, to improve the foreign relations of the United States, and for other purposes.”

³⁸ Willard Cochrane and Mary Ryan, *American Farm Policy, 1948-1973* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 144.

³⁹ Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, “Eisenhower and Ezra Taft Benson: Farm Policy in the 1950s,” *Agricultural History* 44 (1970), 374.

including four billion bushels of wheat, 2.5 billion pounds of dairy products and 4.5 billion pounds of cottonseed products.⁴⁰ Secretary Benson took pride in knowing that America's productive farms helped the U.S. in its Cold War struggle.

Our surpluses are filling a vacuum through feeding hungry people who cannot buy in the market and further helping to strengthen good will toward the United States in these countries. At the same time we are helping to buy time for many of these new governments in their struggle to fend off communism.⁴¹

Americans were similarly ecstatic about a program that offered solutions to both the farm problem, which on its face seemed to offer help to the family farm, while also helping the U.S. establish and maintain good foreign relations with a number of nations teetering on the brink of communism, bringing them closer into the Western sphere of influence.

Similar to foreign food aid, domestic relief became a popular policy solution to the difficult situation facing family farmers. Through state welfare programs and early forms of the federal food stamp and school lunch programs the Department of Agriculture found further outlets through which to move surplus commodities out of costly government storage.⁴² By 1957, 11 million school children were participating in the National School Lunch Program and 16 million students were participating in the

⁴⁰ Benson Address to the State Grange and Delaware Poultry Improvement Association, Camden, Delaware (March 31, 1960), Box 5, Reel 6, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library; and Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, "Eisenhower and Ezra Taft Benson: Farm Policy in the 1950s," *Agricultural History* 44 (1970), 374.

⁴¹ Benson Address at the National Farm Institute, Des Moines, Iowa (Feb. 14, 1958), 3903, Box 5, Reel 4, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁴² U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food Donations to Needy People* (Washington: GPO, 1958), found in File 23759, Thomas Curtis Records, WHMC. The Food Stamp Program began in 1939 and provided two types of stamps, one redeemable for all foods and another redeemable for only foods from surplus commodities. The second stamp offered twice the value of the first, a good indication of a main purpose of the program.

coordinated school milk program.⁴³ Similarly, the USDA provided food to 15 million low income people through state welfare programs or the federal food stamp program.⁴⁴ By the end of the Eisenhower years, Food for Peace and its domestic counterparts aided over 81 million people and reduced Commodity Credit Corporation holdings by millions of tons.⁴⁵ Both programs proved quite popular since they adhered to larger societal values, particularly those that value food as a necessity (thus it should never be destroyed) and rewarding farmers for their productivity and efficiency. And yet, despite such surplus reducing programs, farm commodity surpluses continued to rise throughout this period.⁴⁶

The unique Cold War situation, however, convinced many agricultural policy leaders that rising surplus commodity levels were blessings in disguise. The Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb in 1949, followed closely by the Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957, combined to put Americans on high alert that the Soviets had the capability of nuclear attack at a moment's notice. Cold War Civil Defense leaders realized that the major population centers would be the first targets of such an attack. Moreover, most stored food was located in these population centers. If Americans were to survive an atomic attack, they would not only need to safeguard large portions of the population, but would have to ensure a safe and viable food source until farmers could produce the next crop. Civil defense-minded people and farm groups such as the MFA supported the idea of increased storage capacity of farm commodities, particularly in long-term storable forms and in locations that would not be destroyed or damaged in an

⁴³ Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 152.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁵ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1960), 145.

⁴⁶ William H. Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 135.

atomic attack. The solution: storing commodities in crop form, rather than as processed food, on the millions of rural, isolated and disbursed farms.⁴⁷ This emergency stockpiling of 6-months' supply of food became not only a Cold War imperative, but again, like Food for Peace, a means of addressing the surplus commodity problem within acceptable policy solutions.

The Cold War impetus for extra commodity storage combined with continued surplus production to force policy leaders to raise the storage and loan capabilities of the Commodity Credit Corporation. By 1954, the price support program had encouraged such overproduction that the CCC had reached its loaning authority limit of \$6.75 billion. President Eisenhower requested that CCC borrowing appropriations be raised to \$8.5 billion, a request that easily passed the Republican controlled Congress. By mid-1954, Eisenhower noticed that CCC borrowing had again neared its limits. He requested and again received from Congress an increase in CCC borrowing, this time to \$10 billion.⁴⁸ As much as the public had soured on the costs of storing commodities, such policies nonetheless received support particularly within a Cold War context. Stored food and commodities provided a sense of safety Americans desired in the midst of the ever-present threat of atomic attack. Stored food may not have prevented an attack, but at least people could take comfort knowing that if attacked, the nation would have enough food to survive.

As much as surplus production dragged down farm prices and incomes, policy leaders nonetheless believed that one of the best solutions to solving the problems of low

⁴⁷ *Cost Estimates for an Effort to Reduce the Surplus of Farm Products*, (1960) no author noted, found in Box 3, File: Civil Defense—Emergency Stockpiling (food), Don Paarlberg Records, Eisenhower Library.

⁴⁸ Charles P. Masterson, *Speech Kit*, Box 7, Citizens for Eisenhower Records, Eisenhower Library.

farm income and the cost-price squeeze was in fact more farm technology and other tools that improved farmers' efficiency and raised their individual levels of production. Ever the believers in free markets, President Eisenhower, Secretary Benson, and other agriculture policy leaders were easily convinced that the best way for the millions of family farmers suffering low income and the threat of foreclosure was to improve their productivity. Low income, after all, was the major problem that two-fifths of all American farms faced.⁴⁹ "Most urgently needed," noted a National Planning Association report, "Are measures that will bring family living above minimum acceptable standards on more of our farms."⁵⁰ Secretary Benson similarly believed in a policy goal directed at raising the income specifically of low-income farm families. And to do so, Benson suggested helping small farms improve their productivity and efficiency.⁵¹ As Benson noted, "A family farm to be successful...can no longer be organized around one mule and one plow."⁵²

The policy suggestion of helping low-income farms obtain self-sufficiency through increased production and efficiency brought on by more technology worked well with overriding societal values. Americans had for years believed in the economic benefits of technological adoption. Benson recognized the popularity of such an idea.

⁴⁹ Marshall Harris and Robert A. Rowher, *Family Farming: An Agriculture Committee Report* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1957), iv.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Benson address to the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Davenport, IA (Oct. 14, 1954), 1, Box 1, File: Speeches, July 1954-October 1954 (3), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁵² Benson address to the Pennsylvania Millers' and Feed Dealers' Association, Reading, Pennsylvania (Sept. 25, 1956), 2797, Box 1, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

Would our critics stop these adjustments? Would they insist that farmers do away with modern equipment and go back to horses and mules so that adjustments to justify modern equipment would not be necessary?⁵³

For many policy leaders, the popular ideal of the family farm in fact involved a requirement of providing adequate income. An income standard distinguished family farms from simply smaller, noncommercial farms.⁵⁴ The National Planning Association concluded that family-size farms were not as efficient as possible and must be brought up to a high level of efficiency and production.⁵⁵

Eisenhower Administration farm policy leaders believed that the best answer to problems associated with an increasingly technology-based agriculture was in fact, more technology. A statement by Don Paarlberg, agricultural economist and advisor to Benson on farm issues, represents the underlying belief in technology and the view that this technology, both already implemented and that yet to come, was a sign of national progress. “Call it what you will—technological breakthrough, scientific revolution, or production explosion,” Paarlberg confided, “—the fact is that this trend to abundance of our agriculture is irreversible, cumulative, and continuing. This is good. It is progress.”⁵⁶ This belief in technology as a solution to the farm problem became evident in President Eisenhower’s speeches. In a special message on agriculture early in 1956 Eisenhower not only took pride in the technological innovation that had defined the post-war period, but like many Americans, viewed technology as a savior, despite the many problems that accompanied it. “The average size of farms in American agriculture, as

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Harris and Rowher, *Family Farming*, 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁶ Memorandum from Don Paarlberg to Gerald Morgan, *Confidential draft of agriculture speech* (December 17, 1959), 2, Box 7, File: President’s Farm Speech (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

measured by capital or by acres, has rapidly increased.” Eisenhower continued, “To the degree that this trend is associated with the development of more economic and more efficient farm units it is in the interest of farm families and of the nation.”⁵⁷

Based on this idea, President Eisenhower convinced Congress to establish the Rural Development Program in 1955. President Eisenhower later issued Executive Order 10847 in 1959 setting up the Federal Committee for Rural Development that added presidential impetus to the cause of developing farms in poor rural areas. The Rural Development program, initially a pilot program targeting counties and regions with some of the smallest and poorest farms, sought to provide credit and guidance to “inadequate” farms to raise their productivity and efficiency. As Secretary Benson noted, “to produce a good living [a farmer] must have good tools—such as a tractor and the appropriate equipment with it.”⁵⁸

The Rural Development Program provided access to credit to farmers that typically could not obtain credit from private lenders. Using this new source of funds, farm people on inadequate farms, according to the policy, would purchase technology and equipment such as tractors and fertilizers that allowed them to farm more efficiently while raising their total productivity. To make a tractor as efficient as possible, the Rural Development Program also provided credit for land purchases to expand production and thus spread out the cost of a tractor over more acres. This only made sense to Secretary Benson, most agricultural policy observers and the general public. “Farmers should use

⁵⁷ “Special Message on Agriculture,” (January 7, 1956), 29, Box 25, File: State of the Union Message—1956 and other special Messages, Miscellaneous material #2 (1), Gerald Morgan Records, Eisenhower Library.

⁵⁸ Benson address to the Pennsylvania Millers’ and Feed Dealers’ Association, Reading, Pennsylvania (Sept. 25, 1956), 2797, Box 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

fertilizers and every other cost-reducing, yield-increasing practice that pays off,” noted Benson. “They should increase efficiency in every way that is profitable and serviceable.”⁵⁹ Benson effectively defined the problem as an issue of inefficiency and lack of technological implementation. In making such a problem definition, Benson further justified the Rural Development Program and the push to improve farm efficiency as a solution.

Some economists say the average farmer can increase his income by 25 percent to 100 percent or more...IF he uses all the new tools and new techniques...IF he uses the better breeds, better seeds, and better feeds now available.⁶⁰

Despite the overwhelming popularity of the idea of helping farmers improve their efficiency to improve their competitiveness, a few agricultural economists pointed out problems with any policy that presented improved efficiency as a solution to the widespread loss of family farms. Willard Cochrane, agricultural economist who eventually took a position in the Department of Agriculture under the Kennedy Administration, noted that an efficiency approach, such as that in the Rural Development Program, involved macro level implications that proponents failed to consider. First, in order for some smaller farms to become more efficient, especially through an intensification of mechanical power, many would have to increase their farm acreage. However, in most farming areas there was no ready surplus of agricultural land. In order for some farmers to expand, others farmers would have to leave farming to open up farm land for expansion. Moreover, increasing the production and efficiency of individual farms resulted in the macro effect of raising total farm production. This further

⁵⁹ Benson speech to the American Plant Food Council, “Food, Fears, and Facts.” (nd), 983, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁶⁰ Benson address before the National Association of County Agricultural Agents, Salt Lake City, Utah (Oct. 12, 1954), 4, Box 1, File: Speeches, July 1954-October 1954 (3), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

aggravated surplus problems that only perpetuated and deepened the cost-price squeeze.⁶¹ This heightened cost-price squeeze only intensified the competition for survival and the need to find ways to become more efficient. Most farmers turned to more technology, furthering the cycle which Cochrane termed the “technology treadmill.” As one farm policy observer noted, “increasing production will not solve the farmers’ problem. Instead, it frequently causes him more trouble.”⁶²

The Rural Development Program, along with agricultural research and extension programs long a part of Federal farm policy, placed a high value on improved efficiency and production achieved through the implementation of mechanical and chemical technology. As Benson concluded, “I am thoroughly convinced that most of agriculture’s present problems can be met through increased research and education and improved marketing methods.”⁶³ Technology, long a solution to many of the problems Americans faced, had taught them to continue to rely on the same solution for yet another problem, low income for many farm families.

However, as farm policy leaders acknowledged, increasing farm production and efficiency, while appealing as a solution, nonetheless would potentially perpetuate a number of problems, particularly that of price-depressing surpluses. Secretary Benson alluded to this problem but resolved any inconsistencies in his policy ideals.

Now you may perhaps be wondering whether there is some inconsistency in this picture that I’ve been painting about further advances in agricultural yields when one of the biggest present challenges we face is how to dispose of our surpluses. Actually there is no real inconsistency here at all. A prosperous agriculture

⁶¹ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 142-3.

⁶² James G. Patton, *The Case for Farmers* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 39.

⁶³ “Research Results in Progress,” Benson address at a dinner in honor of the 25th Anniversary of the Founding of the Frozen Food Industry, Washington D.C. (April 13, 1954), 3-4, Box 1, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

depends on efficiency—and this in turn depends on increasing productivity per acre, per animal, per machine, and per man-hour.⁶⁴

Because of his and Americans' obsession with technology, efficiency and productivity as social values and hence as ways of defining problems in agriculture, Secretary Benson and many Americans came to overlook or downplay any problems associated with increased use of technology. For many, increased production, improved efficiency and more technology was a sign of progress. Moreover, the belief in production, efficiency and technology worked well with the social value of rewarding work. "Premiums should go to the modern, efficient farmer," urged Benson.⁶⁵ The belief in rewarding work, an underpinning of many Federal policies inside and out of agriculture, came to shape the problem definition process. With some farmers implementing and benefiting economically from new technologies, it became easy to blame late adopters for their economic problems. It also became easy to define the failure to implement the latest technology as the cause of low farm income and the strains millions of family farms faced.

While the development of the Cold War in the post-war era came to shape farm policy decisions, so too did another world-wide issue affect the path of domestic farm policy. As with Cold War-related farm policies, those developed to confront the realities and future potential of a global population boom fit well within the social values and problem definitions that underpinned existing farm policy. Early in the Eisenhower years, administration officials warned of food shortages brought on by growing

⁶⁴ "Food, Fears, and Facts," Benson speech to the American Plant Food Council (nd), Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁶⁵ "Turn Dairy Problems into Opportunities," Benson speech before the American Dairy Association in Chicago, IL (March 23, 1953), 11, Box 1, File: Speeches, February 1953-July 1953 (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

American, but also world-wide populations. “The forecasters of population tell us that by 1975 we shall probably have upwards of 190 million in this Nation,” warned Secretary Benson. “That is about double the number of human souls in this land at the turn of the century.”⁶⁶ Benson, like others worried, “Will we be able to feed ourselves?”⁶⁷ To provide some context of future food needs, Benson provided a comparison. “Just to provide for our annual increase in population at present rates of consumption requires an increase in food supply equal to the present output of all the farms in New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware combined.”⁶⁸ Compounding the problem, Benson concluded that “all of these people will want to eat at least as well on the average as our people are eating today.”⁶⁹

World population growth threatened to raise food demand well above supply, intensifying the fear of future food shortages. Most Americans remembered just a taste of food shortages a decade earlier with post-war food rationing and price inflation. “World population, too, has been increasing,” noted Benson, “at the rate of about 23 million per year. Many areas must look to surplus producing lands, such as the United States, for food.”⁷⁰ Making the task of feeding the nation and world all the more difficult,

⁶⁶ “Our Agricultural Resources,” Benson address before the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, Washington D.C. (April 29, 1953), 2, Box 1, File: Speeches: February 1953-July 1953 (2), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Youth’s Place in the Future,” Benson speech to the FFA (nd), 480, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁶⁹ “The Heart of the Problem,” Benson address to County Agents (nd), 459, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁷⁰ “Youth’s Place in the Future,” Benson speech to the FFA (nd), 479, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

farm population and labor supply continued to dwindle at record rates.⁷¹ Moreover, simply increasing crop land as a means of increasing production was not an option. Certainly some land could be added through irrigation and reclamation projects, but any gains there would be offset by land losses resulting from urban and suburban sprawl as well as erosion.⁷²

For Benson and many Americans, the problem of growing demand was a welcome one and one which they were willing to address with all the resources available. “This means that the burden is on us,” noted Benson again, “to use the available lands more productively and wisely.”⁷³ Moreover, it is one that fit well with social values of valuing productivity and efficiency. “Obviously,” Benson accentuated, “our agriculture will have to produce still more per acre, per animal, and per man-hour. We will need still greater efficiency in production.”⁷⁴ However, it also offered the hope of fully rewarding American agriculture’s increased productive capacity through increased demand, particularly that found in world markets. Responding to the impending population-food supply crisis, Benson concluded, “There is real hope, therefore, for an expanding export market for our farm products.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ “The Heart of the Problem,” Benson address to County Agents (nd), 459. Benson Papers, Box 5, Roll 1, Eisenhower Library.

⁷² “Our Agricultural Resources,” Benson address before the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, Washington D.C. (April 29, 1953), 2-3, Box 1, File: Speeches: February 1953-July 1953 (2), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁴ “The Heart of the Problem,” Benson address to County Agents (nd), 460, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁷⁵ “Youth’s Place in the Future,” Benson speech to the FFA (nd), 479, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

As much as future national and world population growth presented an opportunity to finally embrace the full production power of a revolutionized agriculture, such a welcome problem still stood years away. The more impending problems of a cost-price squeeze and record declines in farm numbers brought Eisenhower Administration officials back to focusing on the present. By 1955, America's off-farm migration had reached record numbers. Declines in farm numbers averaged over half a million per year throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s with no end in sight.

This trend, coupled with the increasing prevalence of part time farming in which family farm members turned to off-farm work for a portion of their income, led Eisenhower farm policy leaders to the realization that saving the family farm did not necessarily require keeping agriculture as the only source of income for farm families. Moreover, some policy leaders perhaps began to accept the fact that pushing farms to increase in size and ratchet up technological use was not as effective as they had hoped in bringing improved income and economic stability to the millions of family farms suffering low income. True D. Morse, Under Secretary of Agriculture and Chairman of the Committee for the Rural Development Program concluded, "Farming alone cannot overcome low incomes and poverty of farm families on small and low-production farms." Instead, Morse suggested, "farming alone need not be the sole source of income for the fine farm families who need more income and a better way of life."⁷⁶ Many farm families already knew this fact. From 1940 to 1960, farm family income from off-farm sources

⁷⁶ True D. Morse, "Farm Families Have More Mixed or Diversified Incomes," address before the Regional Rural Development Conference, Roanoke, Virginia (August 2, 1960), 1, Box 1, File: Agriculture Department File No. 2 (5), Don Paarlberg Records, Eisenhower Library.

more than doubled, from \$2.5 billion per year to \$6.8 billion.⁷⁷ Farm Bureau President Charles Shuman noted that “an important part of the income received by farm people now comes from nonfarm sources.”⁷⁸ Speaking in 1960 about the ineffectiveness of traditional farm policies to help many low-income family farms, Secretary Benson concluded:

To look objectively and realistically at the problems of families in these areas is to realize the futility of trying to help these families through traditional price stabilization and other publicity (sic) supported farm programs.⁷⁹

In deciding to work with the realities of the increasing role part time farming played in the lives of farm families, Eisenhower Administration farm policy leaders included in the Rural Development Act a focus on increasing off-farm work opportunities primarily for men. This policy upheld popular notions of family defined by a male breadwinner and a female caretaker of the home in spite of the growing reality that farm women provided substantial income to support the family. The program provided aid to counties with high concentrations of low-income farms, typically in the Southeast, Appalachian Area, and northern Great Lakes region, to develop infrastructure and lure manufacturing jobs to rural areas. As Benson concluded, “The Rural Development Program aims simply at more and better opportunities both on and off the farm.”⁸⁰

By the end of the Eisenhower years the Rural Development Program achieved minimal success in both expanding low-income family farms into what was considered

⁷⁷ Ibid. Both men and women contributed substantially to the development of off-farm income for farm families. Federal programs aimed at increasing off-farm income focused primarily on developing work for farm men, almost entirely ignoring off-farm work for farm women.

⁷⁸ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1960), 212.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 149.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

adequate family farms and also in creating off-farm income opportunities. Not only did the program receive minimal funding mostly due to the high costs of other agricultural programs, but the program's two goals required inordinate funding to achieve minimal success. The rising capital costs of introducing new technologies on a farm meant that in order to bring just one inadequate farm up to adequate status the Rural Development program would have to spend typically between \$20,000 and up to \$100,000 in grants or loans. Attracting industry to rural areas proved just as difficult as rural areas often lacked the vital infrastructure of high-traffic roads or adequate water and sewer systems necessary for any assembly or manufacturing plant.

The farm problem, determined by Americans as the second most important problem facing the nation in the 1950s, created an interesting policy environment. On the one hand, most programs and policies continued or developed during this period, such as Rural Development, Cold War commodity storage plans, and Food for Peace, received widespread support. These policies fit well into existing social values, particularly in the ways in which they defined the farm problem. Food for Peace defined the problem as a lack of markets for America's agricultural bounty, not to mention that it helped the nation in its Cold War battle with the Soviets for the alliance of a number of Third World nations. Increased on-farm storage of commodities similarly provided secondary Cold War benefits, namely food security in the event of an attack. This policy defined the problem as one of lack of storage that would help farm families market their products at better times, improving their incomes. The Rural Development program defined the farm problem as a lack of technology or non-farm employment opportunities. Both Rural Development program goals fit well with the belief in technology, efficiency and

production as signs of progress or with the value of rewarding work, both on and off the farm as a means of receiving more return.

When various farm policies or proposals did not fit well with overriding societal values either there was considerable divide over policy options, as in the case of flexible or rigid price supports, or little attention and even opposition to policies that defined the problem in ways that contradicted societal values. The debate over price supports in the 1950s stands as the lone area of true policy contention.⁸¹ Both political parties outlined farm policy goals that involved increased research to make production more efficient while also increasing the ways in which farm commodities could be consumed. Both the Democratic Party and Republican Party believed in programs to help farms overcome instability brought on by weather patterns or by market fluctuations. Americans, after all, still viewed stability as key to economic growth. Further, both parties believed in keeping food costs down for consumers while providing better income for farmers.⁸² And while both parties believed in policies that provided stability to farmers, particularly through price supports, little agreement could be found on how to achieve that security, especially as it became evident through the early 1950s that price support programs included considerable cost to taxpayers.⁸³ By 1953, government holdings of surplus commodities had grown so much that the Eisenhower Administration had to find novel

⁸¹ Henry Abraham, "Agricultural Price Supports," *Social Science* (Jan. 1955), 31.

⁸² "Party Platforms on Farm Problems," *New York Times* (Sept., 1952).

⁸³ In 1953 alone, the Commodity Credit Corporation held in its possession farm crops with a total value of over \$3 billion. Benson, "Inherited Problems," address to the National Farm Ranch Congress of the Denver Chamber of Commerce, Denver, CO (April 7, 1953), 11, Box 1, File: Speeches Feb. 1953-July 1953 (2), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library. The costs to store this amount of commodities rose to over \$1.5 million per day, over \$1,000 per minute. Eisenhower, "Excessive Production of Certain Farm Products," message to the House of Representatives 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1, Box 17, File: President Eisenhower's Statements on Agriculture (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

storage areas. Caves, abandoned factories and movie-houses, moth-balled World War II merchant ships and walled-up rural village streets stood in as storage areas for millions of tons of wheat, corn and other grains.⁸⁴ Democrats long believed a switch from fixed supports would result in dramatic farm loss and farm population migration. Republicans, while still concerned for the family farm, became more frustrated with mounting government costs that also seemed to trip up the workings of a free market.⁸⁵

The 1948 Agricultural Act had established as government policy flexible price supports as a means of providing stability to farmers while still allowing demand to signal through the market necessary changes in production and supply. Congress delayed this policy, however, with a temporary measure to provide rigid price supports while the nation was at war in Korea, ensuring that farmers would produce as much as possible. The end of the Korean War, however, did not mark the end of temporary price supports. Recall that a similar delay in application of flexible supports occurred during and after World War II in favor of maintaining rigid supports. While rigid supports had created considerable government held surpluses, switching to flexible supports was not a simple task. Many Americans feared that a switch would allow farm incomes to fall, which in the middle of the cost-price squeeze and mounting concern for the family farm would only induce more unacceptable farm loss.

In 1954, however, after years of debate, President Eisenhower managed to get Congress to implement flexible price supports that would allow a slow drop in the price

⁸⁴ Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem*, 2.

⁸⁵ Secretary Benson's free market philosophy led him to hold rigid supports in particular contempt. In one speech he concluded, "Major dependence on rigid price supports at uneconomic levels will be destructive." Benson, "Turn Dairy Problems into Opportunities," address before the American Dairy Association, Chicago, IL (March 23, 1953), 7, Box 1, File: Speeches, February 1953-July 1953 (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

support level if government supplies of a commodity remained high. “It defies commonsense to continue to encourage,” President Eisenhower remarked, “at the cost of many millions of tax dollars, the building of ever larger excess supplies of products that, as they accumulate, depress farm prices and endanger the future of our farmers.”⁸⁶

Democrats however took an approach that focused more so on the repercussions of switching away from rigid supports than on the continued and growing problems directly resulting from rigid supports.

Under the Agricultural Act of 1954, President Eisenhower implemented a transition away from fixed price supports and toward flexible supports. Starting in 1955, basic price-supported commodities would be supported at 82.5 percent to 90 percent of parity, then 75 percent to 90 percent for 1956 and after.⁸⁷ The 1954 Act also fully implemented the transition to a new parity price formula that used a moving average of market prices for recent years rather than prices obtained in a distant era, namely 1910-1914. Not only did flexible supports push down the price support floor, the modern parity formula further reduced the floor when compared to the actual support prices obtained through the old formula.⁸⁸ The switch received increased support after the Commodity Credit Corporation experienced a number of years of unexpectedly high surpluses that bloated farm program costs. CCC holdings of just four commodities—wheat, corn, cotton and cottonseed oil and dairy products—totaled over \$6 billion by the

⁸⁶ Eisenhower address to the House of Representatives, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., “Excessive Production of Certain Farm Products,” 1, Box 17, File: President Eisenhower’s Statements on Agriculture (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁸⁷ Fite, *American Agriculture*, 23.

⁸⁸ Fred Heinkel, “Is this the Proper Treatment for Agriculture’s Ills...Bleed the Patient?,” *Missouri Farmer* (April 1957), 27.

spring of 1954.⁸⁹ Storage costs alone for all price-supported commodities rose to over \$26 million per month by 1956.⁹⁰ Eisenhower Administration officials warned that continuing such high costs would lead to public outcry for the entire elimination of farm programs.⁹¹

The solution of flexible price supports implemented by Eisenhower and Benson, while seeking to reduce government costs associated with surplus commodities, involved a tradeoff that larger farmers supported. The 1954 Agricultural Act lowered the price floor but also eliminated many acreage limitations originally designed to reduce surplus production. The American Farm Bureau Federation, whose membership typically consisted of the largest and most successful farmers, overwhelmingly preferred fewer government restrictions. Nonfarmers frustrated with farm program costs believed flexible supports would bring down government costs by reducing the security of a guaranteed high price which induced farmers to overproduce. For Benson, the tradeoff of reduced security for increased opportunity simply made sense economically. While farmers would be “at risk in the immediate term,” Benson noted flexible supports would “allow freedom and the best use of land,” fulfilling the social values of freedom, but also efficiency.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ezra Taft Benson, “Looking Toward a New Farm Program,” address at the Farm and Home Show, Grand Forks, North Dakota (April 1, 1954), 4, Box 1, File: Speeches: April 1954-June 1954 (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁹⁰ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 84th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1956), 104.

⁹¹ Senator Karl Mundt to Sherman Adams, Assistant to the President, January 14, 1956, 2, Box 2, File: Agriculture, Department of #2 (2), Morgan Papers, Eisenhower Library.

⁹² Ezra Taft Benson, “Charting the Course,” Address to the Agricultural Council of California, the California Farm Bureau Federation, the California State Grange, the California state Chamber of Commerce and the California State Board of Agriculture, Fresno, Cal. (July 16, 1953), 9-10, Box 1, File: Speeches: Feb. 1953-July 1953, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Papers.

For many farmers experiencing the cost-price squeeze of the post-war era, the switch to flexible supports, alleviated somewhat by reduced acreage limitations, nonetheless created intense anxiety. Representative of many farm groups' concerns, Missouri Farmer Association president Fred Heinkel argued that flexible supports removed support exactly when farmers needed it the most, when market prices fell resulting from overproduction.⁹³ Heinkel also noted that the underlying philosophy of flexible supports, while aiming at reducing surpluses and government costs, also meant that farm families living on the verge of bankruptcy would receive less support while costs would remain the same, pushing many out of farming. Benson's theory of flexible supports "seems to be much the same as that of the medicine men of long ago," Heinkel concluded. "In prescribing for the farmer's ills, he recommends the same old treatment—bleed the patient."⁹⁴ A cartoon in the *Missouri Farmer* used another metaphor to explain the inherent weakness of flexible supports. "Flexible supports are like rubber crutches," the cartoon contended, "won't hold up much!"⁹⁵

As much as taxpayers became frustrated with the rising costs of stabilizing farm incomes, especially through surplus commodity programs, many could nonetheless express concern over the impact on family farms the transition to flexible supports would entail. Typically not involved in the farm policy debate, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, CIO, led by Walter Reuther, took a public stand against the implementation of flexible supports. For the CIO, the concern was not only that lower

⁹³ Fred Heinkel, "Congress and the Farm Problem," *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 1954).

⁹⁴ Fred Heinkel, "Is this the Proper Treatment for Agriculture's Ills...Bleed the Patient?" *Missouri Farmer* (April, 1957), 27.

⁹⁵ *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 1954), 24.

farm supports meant more labor competition for urban jobs from migrating farm people or less farm demand for American manufactured products, it also meant increased difficulty for the survival of the family-type farm and what losing that particular form of agriculture meant to “the cultural and political life” of the nation.⁹⁶ For Reuther and the industrial workers he represented, putting family farmers “through the economic wringer” for the sake of the competitive, free market system based on survival of the most efficient did not make sense.⁹⁷ The CIO may have been playing politics or the organization may have shown actual concern for family farms. Either way, the family farm issue became a critical topic on the debate over flexible supports.

The family farm became perhaps the most important topic of discussion when debating price supports. And like the general debate over flexible v. fixed price supports, the rhetoric of saving the family farm became highly divisive. While many opponents of flexible supports concluded that lowering government aid to farmers would push many family farms over the edge, Eisenhower administration officials sought to disarm such politically powerful rhetoric by using the same family farm rhetoric. “It is my opinion,” wrote Senator Karl Mundt to Sherman Adams, Assistant to the President, “That if, as a group, we stress this shift of emphasis on parity from the farm product to the family type farmer, we would almost completely disarm and defeat the criticisms launched against the President’s proposal.”⁹⁸ In other words, by relating flexible supports to saving the family farm rather than to the idea of parity, Republicans hoped to take advantage of the

⁹⁶ Walter Reuther to Members of the U.S. Senate, July 20, 1954, Stanley Fike Papers, WHMC.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mundt to Adams, January 14, 1956, Box 2, File: Agriculture, Department of #2 (2), Morgan Papers, Eisenhower Library.

power of that rhetoric. Moreover, Eisenhower officials sought to appeal to the ideals of reduced costs and improving farm efficiency as justifications for flexible supports.⁹⁹

By 1956 it had become evident that flexible supports would not meet the primary goal of reducing government farm program costs, but would in fact also fail to stem surplus production or improve the condition specifically for family farms. With reduced acreage limitations and the threat of lower prices, most farmers increased production as a means of securing income. After two years of flexible price supports, the Commodity Credit Corporation had experienced increased holdings of surplus commodities.¹⁰⁰ It held enough surplus wheat to feed the nation for two full years.¹⁰¹ Moreover, off-farm migration continued unabated through the late 1950s while the growth of corporate farming again, while small, nonetheless continued to perplex and worry many Americans as a threat to the family farm. Despite the considerable debate over price supports, the change from rigid to flexible supports did little to change the direction or condition of agriculture.

To understand the multiple failures of farm policy we need to consider and examine three aspects that typically get overlooked: problem definition, the choice of policy tools, and the historical context in which policy is formulated and operated. It is easiest to work inward from historical context to problem definition. The post-war agricultural revolution dramatically altered the situation in which farm policy operated. Compared to pre-World War II agriculture, that of the post-war era can be characterized

⁹⁹ Benson, "The Heart of the Problem," speech to county agents (nd), 460, Box 5, Roll 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

¹⁰⁰ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 140.

¹⁰¹ Fite, *American Agriculture*, 23.

as one of rapid technological adoption, considerable increases in total farm output and declines in farm population. Price supports and other income-stabilizing farm policies continued from earlier periods took a decidedly different path within this context. The technological revolution exploited problems in policy tools that received little attention before. With relatively new technologies, particularly tractors that allowed one farmer to farm many times the number of acres farmed in the past.¹⁰² The increased production resulted in a distortion of federal farm aid toward those who needed it least. The development of the Cold War also shaped the context of farm policy. The threat of nuclear war persuaded many Americans to at least put up with huge surpluses and their considerable costs. Moreover, the need of U.S. foreign policy to develop a means of gaining influence throughout the world led to the particular development of farm programs such as Food for Peace that also led Americans to accept otherwise costly farm surpluses.

The choice of various policy tools further explains the failure of post-war farm policy, notably that of the Eisenhower Administration, to achieve a number of goals. The switch in 1954 from a rigid to flexible price support system, the divisive debate and the arguments by both sides highlight just how widespread was the lack of understanding of the impacts and effectiveness of pursued policy tools. Both sides of the price support debate believed that price supports, as a policy tool, would provide security to millions of farmers.¹⁰³ Further, proponents of both price support methods argued their preferred method would better save the family farm, a growing emphasis as a policy goal in farm policy. However, both sides of the debate failed to recognize the dynamic nature of the

¹⁰² Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 159.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 147.

farm economy responding to policy tools and the limited applicability of pricing mechanisms for targeting a particular form of agriculture, namely the family farm.¹⁰⁴ Farm policy participants either misjudged or failed to consider how farmers would change production patterns in response to the two price support plans. Those advocating fixed supports often failed to acknowledge that such supports encouraged massive overproduction. Those advocating flexible supports meanwhile failed to note that reduced price supports would in many cases encourage farmers to produce more crops in order to offset falling commodity prices.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, both sides refused to recognize the inherent problems of using aid based on individual production as a means of getting aid to those who needed it the most, typically farmers with low production. The end result of focusing aid through price supports was a general frustration with the fact that the USDA spent billions of dollars through this program, and yet that money failed to reach those who needed it most. Thus you get the two responses: taxpayers calling for reductions in the commodity surplus programs, but also calls for increased funding from those concerned with the condition of family farms and the desire to see them aided through the existing program.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, the majority who believed in improving agricultural production efficiency through increased federal funding for agricultural research and development failed to see the consequences of such a policy tool. While it was true that the more efficient farms survived, trying to improve the efficiency of all farms would not necessarily mean that all farms would survive. Instead, it would only lead to heightened

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Fred Heinkel, "Congress and the Farm Problem," *Missouri Farmer* (Feb. 1954).

¹⁰⁶ James G. Patton, *The Case for Farmers* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 137.

competition, a more intense cost-price squeeze as surpluses mounted, and a perpetuation of the technological treadmill as farmers would ever seek more efficient tools to get ahead of the competition.

Finally, the focus of particular policy tools and the failure of farm policy to obtain any measurable successes in saving the family farm, reducing government costs, or bringing down surpluses can be partly attributed to the ways in which policy leaders and the general public defined the problems facing agriculture in the post-war period. For those concerned with the rapid decline in the number of family farms and the increasing market share of corporate farms, determining the problem proved perhaps the most difficult step in establishing successful policy solutions. While most observers agreed that the family farm faced problems, little agreement occurred on what exactly proved to be the source of the difficulty. Some defined the problem as surplus production, dropping the price of farm commodities. Others defined it as rising capital demands that pushed out existing family farmers, prevented young farmers from entering the business and caused many family farms to fail to keep up with technological developments. Still others defined the problem as a lack of markets for growing U.S. farm production while others saw corporate farm competition as the culprit. The lack of stability in agriculture represented still another possible problem definition. Key to understanding problem definition is the fact that people defined problems within a particular cultural context, one that accepted a problem definition only if it fit with overriding societal values that viewed

technology as a solution to societal problems, believed in rewarding production and efficiency, and sought minimal government intervention.¹⁰⁷

Post-war era political leaders from both parties, and generally speaking the American public, defined the problem of the cost-price squeeze within acceptable areas of policy influence. As in many areas of policy development, acceptable policy solutions, guided by underlying social values, have a way of influencing the earlier stage of problem definition so that only acceptable solutions result. In this case, avoidance of discriminatory policy and focus toward rewarding efficiency, maximizing production, providing stability, all the while minimizing government intervention, considerably influenced the problem definition process.¹⁰⁸

Much like the Truman Administration, the Eisenhower Administration held a particular set of underlying values that shaped farm policy, especially in the area of problem definition. For both administrations of the early post-World War II period, the decline of family farms posed a new policy challenge, one that did not fit well with overarching and established policy goals. Upon entering his position as Secretary of Agriculture under President Eisenhower, Ezra Taft Benson outlined the underlying social values that would prove to have a powerful influence in the Eisenhower Administration's farm policies. First, Benson sought parity for farmers, specifically through high production and improved efficiency. Second, he called for equal economic opportunity to sell farm commodities on a level playing field. Third, Benson demanded efficient use

¹⁰⁷ E.C. Pasour, Jr. and Randal R. Rucker, *Plowshares and Pork Barrels: The Political Economy of Agriculture* (Oakland: The Independent Institute, 2005), 15. Pasour and Rucker note "Agricultural policy in the United States has been heavily influenced by productivity and equity considerations." (15)

¹⁰⁸ John Harmon McElroy, *American Beliefs: What Keeps a Big Country and a Diverse People United* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), outlines a number of widely-held societal values that include: everyone must work and benefit in proportion to their work, labor-saving technology is valuable, the least government possible is best, each person is responsible for his/her own well-being, and achievement determines social rank. "Practical improvement is a kind of 'super belief' of American beliefs." (221)

of agricultural resources. Benson focused on this goal in particular. “The public will not tolerate indefinitely,” Benson warned, any delay in achieving the highest efficient use of resources. Finally, Benson suggested that farmers deserved some protection from wild price fluctuations of the free market.¹⁰⁹ Benson further added that agriculture policy had to adhere to principles of economic freedom, with a minimum of restrictions, ostensibly coming from government, toward farm production.¹¹⁰ Benson stood so firmly for improving efficiency in agriculture and saw it as such a valuable policy goal that he concluded, “Inefficiency should not be subsidized in agriculture or any other segment of our economy.”¹¹¹ Looking back at the stated farm policy goals of Truman Administration officials, those stipulated by Benson represented in fact little change.

Multiple and conflicting definitions of the farm problem guided by overarching values led to policies that often failed to adequately address the problems of agriculture.¹¹² In some instances solutions even directly worked against one another. While the USDA operated the Commodity Credit Corporation and President Eisenhower initiated a Soil Bank program both to reduce surplus production, the USDA and the Interior Department continued to operate land reclamation projects to develop new farming opportunities, particularly in the West. These land reclamation projects only added to surplus production while aggravating cost-conscious taxpayers such as Dorothy

¹⁰⁹ “Charting the Course,” Benson address, Fresno (July 16, 1953), 8, Box 1, File: Speeches: February 1953-July 1953, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

¹¹⁰ “General Statement on Agricultural Policy” (Feb. 5, 1953), 3-4, Box 1, File: Speeches, Feb. 1953-July 1953 (1), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

¹¹¹ “Ibid. Benson made the exact same quote in his book, *Cross Fire: the Eight Years with Eisenhower* (Doubleday: Garden City, New York, 1962), 604.

¹¹² Pasour and Rucker, *Plowshares and Pork Barrels*, 302.

Boves Heinze of Missouri who was “bitterly opposed to putting still MORE land in cultivation, when it costs us over \$700,000 a day to store the SURPLUSES we have.”¹¹³

As Secretary Benson operated the Soil Bank to reduce total production he succeeded in increasing USDA research funding to improve the productivity and efficiency of farms.¹¹⁴ A similar contradiction in policies occurred within the Rural Development Program itself. The program established by President Eisenhower made credit available to some inadequate farms to improve their capacity and labor efficiency and thus turn them into adequate family farms. This program aimed at improving farm efficiency increased the pressure on other family farms, driving some out. Meanwhile, the Rural Development program provided assistance to some farm families seeking to increase their off-farm employment, effectively speeding the elimination of some family farms.

Federal tax policy, another policy tool aimed at improving farm income and stability in the name of the family farm, like other farm policies, developed within a political atmosphere that valued efficiency, production and the use of technology which effectively worked against smaller, family sized farms and shifted aid toward larger producers.¹¹⁵ In many cases, the development of particular tax laws in the post-war years provided the opportunity and the incentive for corporations to enter agriculture. The

¹¹³ Dorothy Boyes Heinze to ASJ Carnahan, June 11, 1955, File 2757, ASJ Carnahan Papers, WHMC. Representative Clarence Cannon similarly received letters from constituents unhappy with contradictory farm policies. One letter to Cannon noted “Our government maintains a bureau spending millions and millions of dollars every year to irrigate more land. The government in another department pays the farmer for not using the land that he has.” E.K. Campbell to Clarence Cannon, August 9, 1957, File 1152, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

¹¹⁴ Lauren Soth, *Farm Trouble* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 135.

¹¹⁵ Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 161; John L. Shover, *First Majority-Last Minority: the Transforming of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 165; and Philip M. Raup, “Corporate Farming in the United States,” *Journal of Economic History* 33 (1973), 283.

Revenue Act of 1942 allowed profits from the sale of farm assets to be treated as capital gains rather than income. As capital gains, the tax rate was cut in half compared to the tax rate on income.¹¹⁶ While aiding both small and large farms, the new tax formula proved more useful for larger farms with higher tax rates. Halving their tax rate provided a larger reduction in taxes than doing so for farmers with smaller taxable incomes and lower tax rates.¹¹⁷

The IRS made two code changes in the 1950s in response to growing concern for family farms in light of corporate competition. Rather than aid the targeted smaller family farms, the code changes actually increased corporate interest in agriculture, resulting in stiffer competition for family farms. In 1951, the IRS changed the tax code to allow farmers to claim cattle as business property rather than personal property.¹¹⁸ As such, cattle purchases became tax deductible. Moreover, this code change rewarded capital-intensive, rather than labor-intensive farming methods which only increased production and the cost-price squeeze.¹¹⁹ In 1958, the IRS added Subchapter S to corporate tax codes. Intended to aid corporations in other sectors, the new Subchapter S codes became a popular tool of agriculturally-involved corporations and investors. Subchapter S allowed corporations to pass income or losses to shareholders.¹²⁰ Taxed as capital gains, investors were able to lower their tax rate. Moreover, any losses sustained

¹¹⁶ Vogler, *The Myth of the Family Farm*, 152.

¹¹⁷ Pasour, Jr. and Rucker, *Plowshares and Pork Barrels*, 300.

¹¹⁸ Raup, "Corporate Farming," *Journal of Economic History* 33 (1973), 281. This tax code change also signifies the post-war trend of recognizing farms as legitimate businesses, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

¹¹⁹ Pasour and Rucker, *Plowshares and Pork Barrels*, 301.

¹²⁰ Neil E. Harl, "Resource Allocation and Capital Accumulation in Corporations Under Subchapter S of the Internal Revenue Code," *Farm Corporations and Their Income Tax Treatment*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (Washington: GPO, 1970), 138.

by corporations could be passed onto investors and carried forward for five years to off-set any taxable income in those years.¹²¹

Farms not organized as corporations now faced added competition from corporate-organized farms which could use losses in one year to off-set taxes in profitable years. Moreover, the new tax code provided an opportunity for nonfarmers to invest in farming to claim income losses or tax deductions in order to off-set their own income or to transfer income into capital gains taxed at a lower rate.¹²² The incentive to invest in farming led to further development of corporate farms while also attracting outside resources. This resulted in increased farm production which only further depressed prices.¹²³ These types of IRS code changes show further attempts on the part of policy makers to define the farm problem in a particular way, namely the lack of capital in agriculture which prevented full adoption of new technologies. This problem definition was acceptable to the public because it fit into larger cultural values. Likewise, problem definitions or policies based on definitions that challenged overarching beliefs either were not discussed in farm policy circles or were roundly rejected by the general public.

With the advent of the post-war agricultural revolution, increased use of technology rather than of land or labor became the more effective means of increasing production. And yet, it was this very increase in production through technology that led to surplus commodities, depressed prices and the cost-price squeeze. Farm policies

¹²¹ Harl, "Resource Allocation," 127 and 139.

¹²² Raup, "Corporate Farming," 285.

¹²³ Pasour and Rucker, *Plowshares and Pork Barrels*, 301. The IRS also came to allow fast-depreciation of farm investments, further rewarding farmers who used capital over labor and thus, further stacking the odds against smaller farms. Austin C. Wherwein, "Farmers Advised on Tax Strategy," *New York Times* (Dec. 10, 1961).

established to curtail production focused exclusively on reducing land or labor to alleviate the surplus commodity problem even though technology became the most important factor in increasing production in the post-war era. Despite this fact, Secretary Benson was firmly aware that trying to restrict output by restricting technology would receive condemnation from the public. “A technological explosion is occurring on American farms,” noted Secretary Benson. “This creates a new dimension in farm policy and makes it virtually impossible to curtail agricultural output with the type of controls acceptable in our society.”¹²⁴

Instead, Secretary Benson and other farm policy leaders relied on acreage limitations through programs such as the Soil Bank to attempt to bring down output. The Soil Bank sought to retire farmland from production, preventing production on those acres which was a more acceptable option to the public than destroying food or reducing the opportunity to use more technology. But with the advent of many new technologies that increased output per acre, any limits on acreage became obsolete.¹²⁵ As one agricultural economist noted, “The whole idea of restricting capital and the adoption of new technology comes into sharp conflict with the values held by our society.”¹²⁶ Despite Secretary Benson’s awareness of the problems associated with technology he, like many members of society, still nonetheless believed wholeheartedly in it as a way to help farm

¹²⁴ Ezra Taft Benson to Senator Allen J. Ellender, May 2, 1957, reprinted in Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality*.

¹²⁵ Richard G. Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age: The Loup Country of Nebraska, 1910-1970* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 98; and J. Carroll Bottum, “Resource Adjustment Through Voluntary Land Retirement System,” In *Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies* (The Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment, 1959), 99.

¹²⁶ Eber Eldridge, “Restricting Capital and Technology: The Farm Problem... What are the Choices?” The Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment (Oct. 1960), found in File 1177, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

people. “To keep our agriculture sound,” Benson noted, “we must keep its technology up to date.”¹²⁷ Considering the value people placed on technology, any policy aimed at limiting or prohibiting it would come under immediate attack, even if effective in alleviating more burdensome problems such as surpluses. Society simply equated technology with progress.¹²⁸ Any challenge to such an overarching societal view would be unacceptable for the foreseeable future. Not until the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1961 did Americans begin to question their faith in technology. This work and the start of the environmental movement would eventually lead to the development and growth of the organic foods movement.¹²⁹

By the end of the 1950s and the Eisenhower years Americans had experienced an agricultural revolution that yielded monumental benefits while also creating considerable concerns. On one hand, the rapid improvements in production and efficiency through the adoption of technology improved the rural standard of living, kept food prices relatively low during times of intense world demand, and released farm labor to industry helping to propel American wealth and the economy.¹³⁰ Yet, these changes also created new

¹²⁷ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1960), 142.

¹²⁸ Todd R. LaPorte and Daniel Metlay, “Technology Observed: Attitudes of a Wary Public,” *Science* (April, 1975): 121-127. LaPorte and Metlay note the unwavering American belief in technology until the considerable costs and unobserved returns of space exploration led people to begin to question their belief in technology. A poll conducted in 1964 asked: “Are you glad that science and technology have developed so rapidly in recent years—or do you think it would have been better if scientific and technical development had been at a somewhat slower pace? Of 1,564 respondents, 71% answered “glad,” 19% answered “slower pace,” and 10% answered “don’t know.” Survey by Institute for International Social Research and Gallup Organization, October, 1964. Retrieved October 11, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <http://www.ropercenter.ucnn.edu/ipoll.html>.

¹²⁹ I will address these later developments in the conclusion.

¹³⁰ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1960), 140.

difficulties for farm families. The cost-price squeeze and technology treadmill, coupled with increased competition from corporate entities all made farming a more competitive business, one that forced out millions of farm people. Not only were there problems of displacement, but considering the cultural significance of the displaced family farmers, their loss proved particularly worrisome for Americans, even those with no economic interest in agriculture.

Government agricultural policy through the early post-war period proved to have little effect on the agricultural revolution.¹³¹ In some cases, farm policy programs actually intensified the revolution. In other cases, farm policies aimed at aiding those unable to keep up with changes or experiencing the negative consequences of the revolution often failed to do so because of conflicting policy tools and/or problem definitions. Moreover, many of the programs implemented focused on solving perceived problems and often failed to address more important or influential problems. For many policy leaders charged with defining the problem they could not escape the dominant social values that delineated what could be considered a problem. In commenting about the triumph of the social value of efficiency over saving farmers, the Committee for Economic Development noted:

The irony is that the farmer to be saved wasn't; since the New Deal, one of every three farmers has quit. The exodus from farming, in a sense of triumph of efficiency over intervention, continues to the present day.¹³²

¹³¹ Dale Hathaway, "United States Farm Policy: An Appraisal," *Journal of Farm Economics* 41 (May 1959), 18; and Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, "Eisenhower and Ezra Taft Benson: Farm Policy in the 1950s," *Agricultural History* 44 (1970), 376-7.

¹³² Committee for Economic Development, *Toward a Realistic Farm Program* (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1957), 218.

And yet, even if social values prohibited policy leaders from addressing the root problems challenging family farmers, the American people nonetheless experienced ultimate concern for the family farm in the post-war era. In 1960, legislators proposed a total of sixteen similarly-designed bills outlining policies to aid or save the family farm. Taken collectively, the sixteen bills comprised the Family Farm Income Act of 1960, garnering considerable interest which mirrored America's concern for the family farm.¹³³ This bill proposed a limit on government aid to any one farm, a concept that enjoyed widespread support from people concerned for the family farm in light of corporate competition. "This measure seeks to aid the efficient family farm rather than the mammoth corporate farm that clearly needs no aid at all," noted Andrew J. Biemiller, Director of the AFL-CIO, who commented on the Family Farm Income Act not out of economic interest, but out of concern for the cultural and social institution known as the family farm.¹³⁴ A payment limitation was not a new idea. Charles Brannan first proposed the idea in his defeated Brannan Plan in an early response to corporate involvement in agriculture.

When viewed by itself payment limitations received popular support. But when viewed within the context of other concerns, few Americans stood willing to continue that support. A statement by Don Paarlberg, Special Assistant to President Eisenhower on Economic Affairs, exemplifies most people's reactions to the idea of saving the family farm when placed within a context of other values. "This Act, in effect, denies to the consumers the fruits of our scientific advances in agriculture during the past fifty years,"

¹³³ In hearings on the Family Farm Income Act of 1960, the AFL-CIO testified in favor. Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 86th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: GPO, 1960), 528.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 528.

noted Paarlberg. “All the money that we have spent on improving the techniques of agricultural production, lowering the cost of producing farm products—the effect of all this effort would be denied.”¹³⁵ The Family Farm Income Act passed Congress, but died as a result of President Eisenhower’s pocket veto, a fitting result that mimicked the public’s hierarchy of values. People supported the family farm, but when supporting the family farm meant challenging much longer-held American values, support quietly eroded away. Either way, the chosen policy tool, price supports, would have done little to effectively change post-war farm situation, granting little hope for a policy solution to the family farm crisis.

As a result of changes in agriculture due to the technological revolution, many Americans developed a cognitive dissonance about farming. On the one hand farming had changed so dramatically that it no longer looking anything like it had just a generation ago. Secretary Benson had to reassure Americans that the modern family farm was still in fact representative of the ideal family farm. “The family farm is undergoing changes, but it is not on the way out.”¹³⁶ “Today it is not uncommon for the owner of a family size unit to have \$50,000--\$100,000—even considerably more—in land, buildings, machinery and livestock.”¹³⁷

Not only had corporate farming grown considerably and the business of family farming changed dramatically, but even the people of most family farms had changed.

¹³⁵ Don Paarlberg, “HR 10355—HR 10370; Sixteen Nearly Identical Bills Entitled ‘Family Farm Income Act of 1960’,” Eisenhower Administration internal memo, February 15, 1960, Box 5, File: Farm Bills—HR 10355, 10370, Paarlberg Records, Eisenhower Library.

¹³⁶ Benson, Address before the Minnesota Bankers Association, St. Paul (June 12, 1957), 3444-5, Box 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

¹³⁷ Ezra Taft Benson, “Producing for Prosperity,” speech to the American Bakers Association, Atlantic City, NJ (Oct. 5, 1955), 1976, Box 1, Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

With consolidated schools, electricity, roads, radio and television, most farm people now looked and acted just like everyone else and had become fully integrated into mass society. In the matter of a generation, American farm people particularly in the Midwest and plains overcame isolation, considerably lower standards of living and unequal educational systems.¹³⁸ “The social differences between town and country people have almost entirely disappeared,” Benson remarked in 1958. “Farm people buy the same brands of food products, wear the same clothes, travel in the same cars...attend the same schools and enjoy the same entertainment as their neighbors in town.”¹³⁹ Many began to question the uniqueness of family farm people and the applicability of the agrarian myth. Secretary Benson foreshadowed, “In a few decades, perhaps much sooner, we probably will be seeing a new agricultural community that might be described as a city life widely spread.”¹⁴⁰

Yet, on the other hand, people were not entirely ready for this change or particularly willing to give up on the concept of the family farm. It was after all, a modern expression of the agrarian myth in light of Cold War fears, rapid social change and the consequences of the agricultural revolution. America had changed so much with World War II and the post-war years that many yearned for something constant and recognizable, something they could hold onto as a stable part of America amidst all of the change. For many the ideal of the family farm provided that nostalgic security blanket in

¹³⁸ Some regional variations existed. In the Deep South, many African American farm people continued to live in substandard conditions and in relative isolation. In most other regions farm people became fully integrated into mass society.

¹³⁹ Ezra Taft Benson, address before the Economic Club of Detroit (Oct. 20, 1958), 1, Box 3, File: Speeches, October 1958 (2), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

¹⁴⁰ Ezra Taft Benson, Address to the Annual Conference of Professional Workers in Agriculture, River Falls, WI (Oct. 25, 1958), 2, Box 3, File: Speeches, October 1958 (2), Benson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

the midst of uncertainty brought on by massive societal changes and constant threats to their security through the Cold War.¹⁴¹ The nostalgic attitudes most Americans held for the idea of the family farm became so powerful that some farm policy commentators complained of this disconnect from the reality of farming. “Reference to the family farm is not a nostalgic throwback to the place where all the kids went for Thanksgiving dinner,” noted one farm policy analyst. “It becomes more difficult with the passing of time to convince people that family farming is not synonymous with either small-scale or backward farming practices.”¹⁴² Americans’ desire for stability and continuity with the past led many to support policies, however ineffective, aimed at saving the family farm.

For the family farmers who remained in farming at the end of the 1950s, this popular albeit perhaps misguided or misinformed support for the family farm would in the near future provide the last means of political power capable of affecting any farm policy that would aid in their survival. With the end of the 1950s the farm population, along with its once cohesive farm bloc, diminished to mere shadows of their former selves. Farm policy commentators warned, “The family farm in the future will need clear-thinking city friends” if the family farm were to have any hope for survival.¹⁴³ In light of the continuing post-war agricultural trends, family farm leaders took this warning to heart as three events in 1962 unfolded that would have profound impacts on the continuation of family farming.

¹⁴¹ Morrell Heald, “Technology in American Culture,” In *American Character and Culture in a Changing World: Some Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. John A. Hague (Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1979), 162. Heald noted, “Americans, thus, have found the agrarian ideal a constant source of inspiration for critiques of industrial society.” (162)

¹⁴² James G. Patton, *The Case for Farmers* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 2.

¹⁴³ Marshall Harris and Robert A. Rowher, *Family Farming: An Agriculture Committee Report* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1957), 50.

1962: State Reapportionment, the Committee for Economic Development and the National Farmers Organization

“If we permit the independent farm family to be destroyed as an element in our American sociological and cultural and political and religious—to say nothing of economic—life we will doom those towns and smaller cities to decay and the seedbed of our democratic institutions to ultimate destruction.”¹

“If the family farm system is to survive there will have to be fewer farms and they will have to be larger.” “There are too many people in farming.”²

Nineteen Sixty-two proved a monumental year in the storyline of the growing popular concern for the preservation of the family farm. In the spring of that year the Supreme Court decided on the case of *Baker v. Carr*, which would have major implications for reapportionment. That decision forced states to fulfill periodic reapportionment requirements after years of neglect and the migration of millions of rural people made existing districts entirely outdated. In the summer, the President’s Committee for Economic Development released its suggestions for dealing with the farm problem. The main proposal included a plan to push out of agriculture one-third of all farmers in the next five years. And in the fall of 1962, the National Farmers Organization (NFO) initiated its first major withholding action as a means of confronting declining commodity prices and the continued fall in the number of family farms.

¹ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *CED Farm Program*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1962), 78-9. Quoted from Jerry Voorhis, Executive Director of the Cooperative League of the USA.

² “A Fresh Look at the Family Farm,” *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 11, 1962).

Each of these events individually brought to the public's attention the growing difficulty faced by family farmers. The potential loss of family farm political power through reapportionment led many Americans to feel torn between the ideals of equal political representation and government designed to aid the family farm. Complicating the matter, Americans began to believe that farms decreasingly met the family farm ideal. The overt threat of farm policy, in the form of the CED report, to push out millions of family farms caused considerable negative public response. Yet, most Americans could not disagree that farming had to continue to become more efficient and productive in order for farms to survive. Finally, the NFO strike instigated in the name of saving many family farms enjoyed only limited popular support due to the popular perception that few remaining farms fit the family farm image. Unfortunately for the NFO, the withholding action brought with it inherent weaknesses that led to its ultimate failure.

These three events highlighted the contradictions between actions that would support the cultural ideal of the family farm and larger societal values. For example, for those concerned about the decline of family farms, one way of preventing further decline would be to give farm people more political power through representation. Doing so would allow farm people a disproportionate amount of political power necessary to pass family farm-friendly legislation. However, in doing so, or in continuing to do so through failures to reapportion, states created tension with the larger democratic value of equal representation. Likewise, the initial emotional response to the CED's proposal to push millions of people off of farms was one of anger, particularly from struggling farmers. Few could support the idea of getting rid of such a vaunted cultural ideal, the family farm. Yet, few could ignore the reality that many family farms failed to provide enough

income to offer a reasonable standard of living. Moreover, the CED proposal in effect simply called for a more efficient and technologically-based agricultural production system.

Finally, for many farm families, the NFO's withholding action in the fall of 1962 offered a sense of hope for a solution to saving the family farm through market manipulation where government policy had failed. The NFO withholding action aimed at forcing food processors to sign long-term contracts with the farm organization. Yet, the withholding action created intense opposition despite its goal of saving the family farm. Americans could not help but criticize a plan that would effectively raise the cost of food while also denying to Americans the economic benefits of the many technological advances in agriculture as well as the lower costs of production associated with larger producers.

The two quotes presented at the beginning of this chapter provide a good example of the mixed sentiment many held toward the family farm. On one hand, any loss in family farms or any action that would increase the threat to family farms was seen as an attack on American culture and its past. Yet, on the other hand, Americans recognized that farms had to be as efficient as possible, just like any other business, in order to survive. Americans at the time would have been hard pressed to agree with one statement over the other.

The events of 1962 provide a framework for understanding the impact of the agricultural revolution on the values of Americans as well as how Americans resolved conflicts in values that resulted from that technological revolution. Moreover, the events of 1962 provide insight into how Americans viewed farming now that the post-war

agricultural revolution had almost two decades in which to take effect and people's attitudes and values had enough time to adjust to the revolutionized agriculture. *Baker v. Carr*, the CED proposal, the NFO withholding action, not to mention failures of farm policy, all elicited responses that highlight the growing disconnect between the reality of farming and the cultural ideal millions of Americans increasingly held. This disconnect, or what President Kennedy's Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman termed the "understanding gap," can be attributed to a general ignorance of agriculture as fewer Americans had any direct experience with farming. The understanding gap can also be attributed to the popular desire to see modern agriculture fit a cultural image based increasingly on the historical image of farming, one lacking of many post-war technological advances in production and increases in farm size.³ In this sense, the events of 1962 provide not just a culmination of the many changes that occurred in the early post-war era, but also provide a sense of future American response to the agricultural revolution which continued through the remainder of the twentieth century. As the century and the agricultural revolution wore on, Americans increasingly asked the question, was farming a way of life that deserved preferential policy treatment or had it become a business no different from any other?⁴

³ Lauren Soth, "Report from the American Heartland," *New York Times* (June 3, 1962); Gordon E. Baker, *Rural Versus Urban Political Power: The Nature and Consequences of Unbalanced Representation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1955), 1; and Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies and Manpower, *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze*, 87th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1961), 2. Soth noted "The rapid transformation of the maturing United States from a rural society of half a century ago to one of the most urbanized societies on earth...has not been fully reflected in law, politics, or public thought." Baker noted "The shift over the past generation from a rural to an urban society has taken place here so rapidly—almost suddenly—that attitudes have understandably lagged." (1). Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman noted in *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze* that "the average citizen has a distorted image of agriculture and the farmer," (2).

⁴ William Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), xi. Peterson became one of the first to ask the "way of life or business" question.

One the most important social changes of the post-World War II period, the internal migration of millions of rural residents to urban areas held considerable political consequences. For rural areas, the loss of one half of their residents would have meant a proportional loss of political power in the halls of state governments. This would in turn lead to public policy shifting in focus to urban areas as the population drifted in that direction. This shift in political power however required a periodic reapportioning of representation in state government, a process controlled and thus rarely carried out by state elected officials. One cannot blame the state leaders for ignoring the need to reapportion. Many had been elected in rural districts and reapportionment threatened to consolidate rural districts beset by population loss. Others feared redistricting would result in the loss of party power.⁵ Moreover, representatives had become comfortable in the status quo, any change or challenge represented uncertainty.⁶

Compounding the failure of state representatives to redistrict, the political culture of the agrarian myth valued rural people over urban, often portraying rural people as more moral and thus better fitted to make political decisions, helping to explain the refusal of many states to reapportion.⁷ This agrarian myth helped rural people maintain a stronghold on the American political imagination which translated into latent nonfarmer support for overrepresentation of farm people.⁸ Similarly, American culture typically distrusted urban-based political power because of its long-standing history with party

⁵ Gordon E. Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution: Representation, Political Power, and the Supreme Court* (New York: Random House, 1966), 29.

⁶ Anthony Lewis, "Legislative Balance Shifts Under Redistricting Ruling," *New York Times* (Nov. 11, 1963).

⁷ Lauren Soth, *Farm Trouble* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 27.

⁸ Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9.

machines that often wielded political power in undemocratic ways.⁹ Post-war population trends added further weight to the distrust of urban political power. The great migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban north in cities such as Chicago and Detroit, or to urban centers of the South such as Atlanta, led many whites to further distrust urban political power.¹⁰ In the case of unequal representation in Georgia, rural Georgia voters held 100 times the voting power of their urban counterparts, significantly affecting the development of Civil Rights in that state. “Atlanta today is a progressive city where Negroes vote and serve on the police force and have economic status,” noted the *New York Times*. “But Atlanta has had little influence in the state government.”¹¹

The failure to reapportion held considerable consequences for growing urban and suburban areas. In many states, city officials often had to obtain state legislative approval of annual taxation and budget policies. This meant that city officials had to tailor their policies in a way that would garner support from rural dominated state legislatures. For example, in 1953, the mayor of St. Louis went on a 1,800 mile trek through rural Missouri to get support for an extension of the city’s earnings tax beyond its scheduled expiration date.¹²

Despite the migration of millions of residents throughout the twentieth century and particularly in the post-World War II period, state legislatures oftentimes ignored reapportionment for their own sake, often with considerable political and policy consequences. As Gus Tyler, Assistant President of the International Ladies’ Garment

⁹ Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution*, 48, 54, 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 109.

¹¹ Anthony Lewis, “Fight for Equal Vote,” *New York Times* (May 13, 1962).

¹² Baker, *Rural Versus Urban Political Power*, 29.

Workers' Union noted, "The consequences of the massive internal migration of the last seven decades has been a clinging to power of those who now represent only a minority of the population."¹³ By the early 1960s, the United States Conference of Mayors singled out unequal representation as the major source of trouble for municipalities.¹⁴ While agricultural interests saw their national political power dwindle with the rural population, the failure to reapportion state representation meant that agricultural interests often maintained an unusually high level of influence in state governments.¹⁵

The failure to reapportion resulted in considerable inequality in representation by the early 1960s. Of 99 state legislative chambers (Nebraska is unicameral), majorities in 14 of the chambers could be elected by less than one-fifth of the people of their states.¹⁶ Ninety-seven of the 99 chambers were apportioned to give an advantage to rural votes.¹⁷ Between 1910 and 1960 the relative voting power of most rural counties rose from 113 percent to 171 percent while for urban counties voting power fell from 81 to 76 percent.¹⁸

¹³ Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, *Reapportionment of State Legislatures: Relating to the Problem of Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1965), 922.

¹⁴ Baker, *Rural Versus Urban Political Power*, 27. In a similar statement, The Greater Portland Council of Churches concluded "Our Nation's great domestic crises of this century grow from the problems facing the concentrations of people in our urban and suburban areas. It is unrealistic to have legislatures that have memberships predominantly from rural areas undertaking to solve these problems for the residents of our metropolitan areas." Ibid, 975.

¹⁵ Gordon Baker, *Rural Versus Urban Political Power*, 24.

¹⁶ Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1965), 822.

¹⁷ John P. White and Norman C. Thomas, "Urban and Rural Representation and State Legislative Apportionment," *Western Political Quarterly* 17 (1964), 726.

¹⁸ Ralph Eisenberg, "Power of Rural Vote," *National Civic Review* 51 (1962), 489.

Put another way, by 1960, voters in large urban and suburban areas had on average less than one-half the representation held by voters in rural areas.¹⁹

Some specific examples highlight the political inequality resulting from a failure to reapportion state representation in the midst of considerable rural-to-urban migration. Due to the failure to reapportion in Nevada, a 30 percent rural minority became a 50 percent majority in one chamber and a 73 percent majority in the other. In Virginia, a 44 percent rural minority, again through the lack of reapportionment, became a 65 and 70 percent majority. In the states of Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Nebraska, Nevada, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Virginia, a rural minority was turned into a political majority.²⁰ In California, Los Angeles County, with a population of 4.1 million had one State senator, the same level of representation of three counties with a combined population of 14,000.²¹ In Missouri, two House of Representative districts, having the same political power, had quite unequal representation. One district included 52,970 residents while the other included just 3,960.²² Florida, like many other states, had not redistricted in over 50 years, freezing out of power many urban areas experiencing problems associated with rapid population growth.²³

The case of Georgia provides perhaps the best illustration of political inequality resulting from neglect of reapportionment despite considerable rural-to-urban migration. In the Georgia Senate, 21.4 percent of the state's population elected a majority of the

¹⁹ Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution*, 23-4.

²⁰ White and Thomas, "Urban and Rural Representation," *Western Political Quarterly* 17 (1964), 729.

²¹ "Your Vote: Supreme Court May Put a New Value on It," *U.S. News and World Report* (Nov. 6, 1961).

²² Manning J. Dauer and Robert G. Kelsay, "Unrepresentative States," *Legislative Apportionment: Key to Power*, ed. Howard D. Hamilton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 7.

²³ Anthony Lewis, "Legislative Balance Shifts," *New York Times* (Nov. 11, 1963).

senators while in the Georgia House, 22.5 percent of the state population elected a majority of the representatives.²⁴ A rural voter in Georgia had 100 times the voting power as an urban Georgian.²⁵ The 1962 Supreme Court case of *Baker v. Carr* cleared the way for redress of the political inequality built up over years of internal migration and failed reapportionment.²⁶

On March 26, 1962, the Supreme Court, in a 6 to 2 decision in the case of *Baker v. Carr*, concluded that federal courts could hear lawsuits challenging existing legislative apportionments while also acknowledging that inequalities in district populations could constitute a violation of the 14th Amendment equal protection clause.²⁷ The case centered on the failure of the Tennessee Legislature to reapportion since 1901, creating considerable political inequality and “invidious discrimination.”²⁸ The Court deemed unconstitutional long delays in redistricting and provided for Federal court oversight of redistricting, allowing the courts to reject redistricting proposals with invidious discrimination. The results of *Baker v. Carr* applied only to state representative districts as Congress redistricted in response to population shifts. The Court, while rejecting a

²⁴ Claude Sitton, “Georgia Districts Voided by Court,” *New York Times* (May 26, 1962).

²⁵ Anthony Lewis, “Fight for Equal Vote,” *New York Times* (May 13, 1962) and Claude Sitton, “U.S. Court Rejects New Georgia Law on Unit Elections,” *New York Times* (April 29, 1962).

²⁶ Eisenberg, “Power of Rural Vote,” *National Civic Review* 51 (1962), 491. Eisenberg noted that in 1960, in response to growing urban demand for reapportionment, 25 states reapportioned but had little effect.

²⁷ Malcolm Jewell, *The Politics of Reapportionment* (New York: Atherton Press, 1962), 46-7 and Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution*, 4-5.

²⁸ T. Rodman Layman, “Aftermath of Baker v. Carr,” *William and Mary Law Review* 93 (1963), 98; Claude Sitton, “Georgia Districts Voided by Court,” *New York Times* (May 26, 1962); and Jewell, *The Politics of Reapportionment*, 39.

strict mathematical equality rule, nonetheless suggested a one person, one vote guideline for state redistricting efforts.²⁹

Overturing over 100 years of Supreme Court tradition of nonjusticiability of political questions established in the 1849 case of *Luther v. Borden*, *Baker v. Carr* became a possibility in 1962 due to the Civil Rights movement and the growing popular awareness of political equality that resulted. The standard of preventing “invidious discrimination” arose within the context of Civil Rights battles against blatant political and economic discrimination, overturning the 1947 Supreme Court case of *Colegrove v. Green* which then ruled the court would not enter the political thicket of reapportionment.³⁰ In fact, it was a 1960 Civil Rights case that aided the transition in Supreme Court judicial philosophy. In *Gomillion v. Lightfoot*, 400 African American Citizens of Tuskegee, Alabama charged they were disenfranchised by the city when it deannexed their neighborhood, remaking the geographic boundary of the city from 4-sided to 28-sided.³¹ The court ruled that a legislature could not single out a readily isolated segment for special discriminatory treatment.

The decision in *Baker v. Carr* held immediate consequences for a number of states, not just Tennessee. Not only did the decision uphold the invalidation of redistricting efforts in 16 states, as determined by lower courts, it established the context in which 50 legal cases would be decided and eight special sessions implemented by state legislatures with the intent of creating new redistricting plans.³² Within hours after

²⁹ Arthur Krock, “In the Nation: An Unusual Potential of Redistricting,” *New York Times* (April 2, 1963).

³⁰ T. Rodman Layman, “Aftermath of Baker v. Carr,” 95.

³¹ *Ibid*, 97.

³² Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution*, 8-9.

passage of *Baker v. Carr*, the Federal District Court located in Georgia invalidated the reapportionment methods established by the Georgia state legislature and required the legislature to develop a new reapportionment plan that came much closer to the one person, one vote guideline.³³ States across the nation rushed into legislative session to develop plans that met the new Supreme Court-enforced reapportionment standards. As the *New York Times* noted, “the consequences of [*Baker v. Carr*] have been spectacular.” “More than half of the states of the union have acted to correct in some measure the rank unfairness from which the city voter has long suffered.”³⁴

For those concerned with the declining family farm, the *Baker v. Carr* decision marked not a victory for political equality, but a further threat to the survival of family farms across the nation. In reading the historical material one will find that those opposing the *Baker v. Carr* decision rarely stated outright their concern for the family farm. Instead they posed their concerns in ways that would have a better chance of challenging the idea of equal representation. As much as protagonists of the family farm knew people held concern for that form of agriculture, they also knew that Americans were beginning to question the agrarian myth and the idea of a superior rural people in response to changes associated with the post-war agricultural revolution. Instead, family farm proponents cloaked their concern for the loss of family farm political power with the rhetoric of American tradition, protection for the political minority, both undergirded by a veiled message of the agrarian myth.

³³ Sitton, “Georgia Districts Voided,” *New York Times* (May 26, 1962); and Layman, “Aftermath of Baker,” 100.

³⁴ “Whose Vote Count Most?” *New York Times* (March 29, 1963) and Raymond Robinson, “22 States Battling on Redistricting,” *New York Times* (Aug. 6, 1962).

The Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, a farm organization that developed in the 19th century as a means of organizing farmers politically, educating farm people on good farming practices, and providing social events for farm people to overcome the isolation of rural farm living, unanimously adopted at its 98th Annual Session a resolution opposing the *Baker v. Carr* decision. Further, the Grange stated organizational support for a Constitutional Amendment allowing states to apportion one chamber of the state legislature on the basis of geography, or county. In the resolution the Grange reiterated that “the progress and prosperity of our total civilization depends” upon the care of farmland and natural resources and that legislation on such matters should be left to farm people who “have a closer acquaintance than do urban voters” on such matters and are “the best informed and most vitally interested men and women available” to deal with such important issues.³⁵ One letter to the editor of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* warned, “With representation in state legislatures based solely on numbers, big city bosses will control larger blocs and will be trying to spread corruption through the state.”³⁶

Those supporting a Constitutional Amendment originally proposed by Senator Everitt Dirkson of Illinois to allow states to apportion one house of the state legislature according to a method other than population would be disappointed with the eventual failure of the amendment proposal, struck down in 1964 by the Supreme Court decision in *Reynolds v. Sims*.³⁷ Proponents of what became known as the little federal system argued that basing representation entirely on population would place the rural minority in

³⁵ Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1965), 771.

³⁶ “Constitution a Scrap of Paper!” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (June 17, 1964). Available in File 204, Thomas Frazier Baker, III collection, WHMC.

³⁷ *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964).

the dangerous position of little or no political power to combat the political action of the more populous urban areas.

Some groups such as the Dairymen's League Cooperative Association, led by Lester W. Martin, pleaded to representatives that a Constitutional Amendment was necessary for the sake of "the 16,000 farm families who are members of [the] association."³⁸ Supporters of this idea argued that each county get at least one representative in one chamber of state legislatures as a means of protecting rural, and especially family farm voters. Thomas Graham, Speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives used the veiled language of minority rights in support of the little federal system designed to "protect all interests of importance from being run over, roughshod, by conflicting interests."³⁹ Representative Richard Ichord, Democrat of Missouri, framed the issue as one of the people's right to choose their representative system. "This is not an issue of one-man, one-vote legislatures," argued Ichord. "It is not even an issue of balanced legislatures patterned after the Congress. The issue is shall the people have the right to choose the kind of legislature which meets their needs, in their state?"⁴⁰

Opponents to disproportionate farm representation, however concerned they may have been with protecting the rural minority or the political power of family farms, nonetheless sided with Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren on the issue of

³⁸ Lester W. Martin to Birch E. Bayh, in *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (1965), 968.

³⁹ Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (1965), 178. In testimony given at these hearings, Dudley T. Campbell of the American National Cattlemen's Association testified that "There is obviously the danger in numerical equality voting that less populated areas would be neglected, or that, in a conflict between areas of a State, the more populated area would elect an entire legislature and the minority would never be heard." (416)

⁴⁰ "Rep. Ichord says a Reapportionment Amendment must win despite opponents," January 24, 1966, Press Release, Box 91, File: Reapportionment, Committee for Government of the People, Richard Ichord Papers, WHMC.

reapportionment. “Legislators represent people, not trees or acres. Legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests.”⁴¹ For members of the growing urban and suburban populations frustrated with the disproportionate political power held by rural America, reapportionment provided an opportunity to reform political institutions to better address growing urban problems such as crime, development and racial tensions.

Protecting a rural minority through disproportionate representation not only contradicted democratic ideals, it presented additional problems. First, the idea of protecting one minority group through disproportionate representation opened up the slippery slope of doing so for all minority groups. Gus Tyler, Assistant President of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, rhetorically asked, “Why should rural America alone be the privileged minority?” Tyler further asked, “What is to prevent other minorities from demanding like protective privilege tomorrow?”⁴² Tyler specifically referred to racial minorities. “There are states where Negroes are in a minority, demanding protection of their rights. Shall we then weight one house of the legislature in these states to guarantee control or an exaggerated vote to Negroes?”⁴³ The growth and success of the Civil Rights movement in the post-World War II era led many white Americans to question requests from all minority groups for increased political power.

Not only did Americans come to oppose attempts of any minority group seeking to obtain disproportionate political power, often at the expense of the rest of the population, but the justification presented by farm people stood out as particularly outdated and aggravating to many urban Americans. The underlying agrarian myth

⁴¹ *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (1965), 67.

⁴² *Ibid*, 826.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

provided the cultural and emotional basis for many farm people arguing for the continuation of disproportionate representation in state legislatures. For urban Americans, the modern reality broke considerably from the agrarian myth. “How realistic is the agrarian myth?” asked Gordon Baker. “Slums are by no means confined to cities. Decaying rural areas are often deficient in both material and cultural advantages.”⁴⁴ Baker continued, “Political machines and bosses are by no means confined to urban areas.”⁴⁵

The post-war agricultural revolution had remade American farming into a modern industrial form. No longer was it a holdover from the past oddly out of place in an industrial society. Farming had become just as industrial and business-oriented as any urban manufacturer or corporation. “It is a thing of the past,” commented Gus Tyler about the agrarian ideal, “brushed aside, whether we want it or not, by the onrush of an industrial civilization.”⁴⁶ One Detroit auto worker noted how the agrarian myth or the idea of a superior rural people now rang hollow. “I live in a sparsely populated area compared with Detroit, but I do not think I should be overrepresented because I can see more fields under cultivation.”⁴⁷ Moreover, hanging onto the agrarian myth prevented the nation from embracing the future as well as fulfilling the idea of equality. George Tait, pastor of the Bismarck Methodist Church of Bismarck, Missouri noted, “The recent decisions of the Supreme Court...will enable our country to adjust from its rural past to

⁴⁴ Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution*, 55.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (1965), 823.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 921.

its urban present and future.”⁴⁸ “To attempt to return to the comfortable rustic past by enshrining malapportionment in the Constitution,” noted Gus Tyler, “seems totally wrong.”⁴⁹

Moreover, after years of hearing about the farm problem and how farmers, and especially family farmers needed help, the idea of a morally superior farm population lacked resonance. The emptiness of the agrarian myth became particularly apparent for the millions of farm people who had migrated to urban areas in the post-war period. Did they somehow become less valued by living in a different area? The fear of unruly urban mobs, the basis of anti-urban sentiment of the agrarian myth, failed to materialize as urban America came to dominate.⁵⁰

By 1965, 34 states had reapportioned state legislatures, shifting political power to urban centers after years of disproportionate rural political power.⁵¹ And yet, in a convoluted way, Americans held onto the ideal of the agrarian myth, believing that farm people, especially the family farm, needed special treatment. The fact that the reapportionment battle did not occur until the 1960s despite decades of malapportioned state legislatures denotes a widespread regard for rural people.⁵² The family farm, according to many, was dying, and few wished to see such a vaunted institution slip away. The United Auto Workers, after taking a tough stance for reapportionment,

⁴⁸ George L. Tait to Paul C. Jones, September 12, 1964, File 1183, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC; and Wayne Rohrer and Louis Douglas, *The Agrarian Transition in America: Dualism and Change* (Indianapolis: Boobs-Merrill Co., 1969), 54. Rohrer and Douglas noted that the *Baker v. Carr* decision “contests the ideology that farmers are more virtuous than other people.” (54)

⁴⁹ *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (1965), 922.

⁵⁰ Gordon E. Baker, *Rural Versus Urban Political Power: The Nature and Consequences of Unbalanced Representation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1955), 4.

⁵¹ Baker, *The Reapportionment Revolution*, 40.

⁵² Rohrer and Douglas, *The Agrarian Transition in America*, 91.

nonetheless felt compelled to voice their support for the family farm.⁵³ By 1965, California voters had approved four separate plans for reapportionment of the California state senate. Urban voters supported each of these plans that granted disproportionate political power to rural voters. The Supreme Court rejected each of the plans for failing to come close to the one man, one vote principle.⁵⁴ In Colorado, every county, rural and urban, voted against a plan to put both houses on a straight population basis.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, as debate continued over reapportionment, the President's Committee for Economic Development (CED), a council of major business leaders that provided policy advice, released its report on farm policy in July of 1962. Key participants included T.V. Houser, director of Sears, Roebuck & Company and Theodore O. Yntema, Chairman of the Finance Committee of Ford Motor Company. With no farm-oriented members, the CED's member closest to agriculture was Frank Theis, president of Simonds-Shields-Theis Grain Company of Kansas City, Missouri. Buried among policy recommendations to improve the efficiency of farming, make better use of resources and reducing government program costs, the CED outlined a plan to remove two million farmers and their families from agriculture, over a third of the agricultural population, as the main solution to the continuing farm problem. Public outcry arose immediately, lasting for months, as the CED proposal came off as a heartless and calculated push of farm people. The CED plan itself holds important historical insight into farm policy after almost twenty years of the post-war agricultural revolution had taken its effect.

⁵³ *Reapportionment of State Legislatures*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., (1965), 920.

⁵⁴ Arthur Krock, "In the Nation: The Growing Reapportionment 'Thicket'," *New York Times* (June 3, 1965).

⁵⁵ Robert G. Dixon, "Apportionment Moves," *New York Times* (Sept. 24, 1965).

Responding to years of federal policy that failed to solve the farm problem, the CED proposal, while inventive in its call for shutting down two million farms, nonetheless continued the old line of thinking that had guided farm policy throughout the post-World War II period. Just as established farm policies believed in and sought after improving farm efficiency as a solution to low farm income, the CED similarly believed in improving agricultural efficiency “for the farmer’s benefit and the nation’s.”⁵⁶ Moreover, the CED proposal was guided by the belief that established government policies tended to waste taxpayer money with price support programs that prevented price shocks and thus allowed millions of (superfluous) farm families to hang on rather than recognize the realities of the new agricultural economy.⁵⁷ And yet, members of the CED, like the many farm policy leaders of the post-war era, continued to believe in agricultural research and that farm policy should continue and even expand, rather than contract, research funding.⁵⁸ Similarly, CED leaders believed in price supports as a way of moderating seasonal price fluctuations even after they clearly indicated their disapproval of price supports for misleading millions of farm families to stay in farming.⁵⁹ Further, the CED criticized existing farm policy for failing to help “the farmers who were most in need of help.”⁶⁰ And yet, their policies would actively push out those needing the most help.

⁵⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *CED Farm Program*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1962), 365.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 349, 359.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 349, 391.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 349, 390.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 349, 359.

The CED proposal was in fact no different from existing policy. The policy solutions, underlying problem definitions and values were the same. Moreover, the contradictions that had plagued previous farm policy continued within the CED proposal. Much like previous farm policies, the CED proposal recognized the failures of past policies, but offered little actual change. Price supports, agricultural research, intensified use of capital and technology were all there in the CED proposal, no different from previous or existing farm policy.

Still, there was something different about the farm policy recommendations from the Committee for Economic Development that sent a shockwave through not only the farm community, but concerned nonfarmers as well. While major organizations in the past have publicly supported the active removal of farm people from the land as early as the 1930s, the 1962 CED proposal uniquely received widespread criticism in light of the unique post-war circumstances.⁶¹ Throughout the post-war period of off-farm migration government organizations took a clear stance of helping, or at least trying to help, most farm people remain on the land. In fact, many government policies since the turn of the 20th century sought to keep people in farming for various reasons.⁶² But now, with the CED taking a clear stance of flushing out millions of farm families from agriculture there became an overt policy force added to the existing off-farm migration and corporate

⁶¹ For more discussion of rural slum clearance through the New Deal see: Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

⁶² During the Progressive Era through the 1920s policy leaders believed that rural America was losing its best and brightest to urban areas, leaving unskilled and uneducated farm workers behind. Many Progressive Era farm policies sought to keep intelligent and driven farm kids interested in farming or to educate farm people to be better producers for the sake of urban food needs. During the Great Depression, the lack of urban jobs led the Roosevelt Administration to similarly keep farm people on the land. The CED acknowledged this farm policy history in its proposal (357).

farming trends of the post-war period. In testifying against the CED proposal, Pat DuBois, Chairman of the Agricultural Committee of the Independent Bankers Association commented, “The depressed condition of agriculture already has prompted millions of farm people to leave the soil. There is no merit, no benefit to anyone, in attempting to accelerate this movement.”⁶³ Few could ignore, let alone agree with the CED statement, “Although the exodus from agriculture in the past decade or longer has been large by almost any standards, it has not been large enough.”⁶⁴

The CED farm policy proposal of mid-1962 and the public response marks another event in the competition of values in shaping post-war farm policy and the wide gulf between those values. Had Americans read the CED proposal with all references to farming removed, many would have heartily agreed with the recommendations. The adaptive approach, as the CED called its plan, sought to simply help get labor and capital to the areas in which they would be most productive and earn the most income. Moreover, the plan sought to “promote adjustments but cushion the effects upon people and property.”⁶⁵ The CED did not believe in protectionism to artificially hold up prices and incomes. This method pursued “the basic national interest in efficiency and growth.”⁶⁶ Similarly, the CED did not support a policy of laissez-faire when movement of labor and capital was inhibited and opportunities for employing that labor and capital

⁶³ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *CED Farm Program*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., (1962), 103.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 355.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 347.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 347.

in other areas of the economy are lacking.⁶⁷ Few Americans would have had any problems with any of these statements.

As soon as the ideas presented by the CED implied the removal of millions of farm families, Americans became considerably antagonistic to the CED proposal. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted, “The proposal to weed out the marginal and inefficient farms is certain to meet strong resistance. The slogan, ‘Preserve the family farm,’ is akin to Holy Writ.”⁶⁸ While the ideal of saving the family farm held support from many Americans, farm families themselves and their organizations presented the most vociferous response against the plan. The National Farmers Organization, a group organized in 1955 out of frustration with the cost-price squeeze and concern for the loss of family farms, called the CED proposal “the most vicious attack ever made on family-type agriculture.”⁶⁹ James Patton, President of the National Farmers Union, asked “How can we encourage and protect the family farm structure that still is the heart of our agriculture from encroachment by the factory-in-the-field agriculture?”⁷⁰ Jerry Voorhis, Executive Director of the Cooperative League of the USA, noted the CED plan would “permit the independent farm family to be destroyed as an element in our American sociological and cultural and political and religious—to say nothing of economic—life.”⁷¹ Even President Kennedy’s Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, concluded that the CED plan would result in “an alteration of the basic character of American

⁶⁷ Ibid, 346.

⁶⁸ “Administration to Push Broad New Farm Plan,” *Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 2, 1962).

⁶⁹ “Farmers in Midwest Threaten to Boycott Firms Whose Officials Signed CED Report,” *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 17, 1962).

⁷⁰ Ibid, 123.

⁷¹ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *CED Farm Program*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., (1962), 78-9.

agriculture by forces that threaten the extinction of the family farm system.”⁷² Under the CED proposal, Voorhis warned, “Only corporations or the wealthiest of our people could indeed afford to farm at all. Our agriculture would rapidly tend to a corporation type operation.”⁷³

Non-farmers responded to the CED proposal with mixed emotions. On the one had, saving the family farm had become a highly charged emotional issue. Yet, on the other had, many non-farmers concluded that federal farm expenditures had become bloated. Moreover, the growth of corporate farming and the agricultural revolution had changed the nature of all farms to the point that many non-farmers just did not see modern agriculture as fulfilling the agrarian ideal. Their vision of a family farm focused on the farm before changes in production technology and acreage increases took hold. Yet, the loss of farms left many nonfarmers concerned for the idea of the family farm as well as for possible secondary impacts resulting from farm policy guided by the CED proposal. Democratic representative Lester Johnson of Wisconsin asked, “Since industry and our cities are already troubled by unemployment, where would the two million displaced farmers find jobs?”⁷⁴ “The serious dislocation of this national rural community,” The *Washington Post* noted, “brought about by a drastic contraction of agriculture...could so greatly diminish buying power in rural America that nonfarm industry would be affected.”⁷⁵ Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman concluded the

⁷² Ibid, 298.

⁷³ Ibid, 79.

⁷⁴ Rep. Lester Johnson, “Agriculture at the Crossroads,” Congressional Record---House 1962, found in File 1243, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁷⁵ “Adaptive Agriculture,” *Washington Post* (July 16, 1962).

CED plan would not only result in the potential extinction of the family farm, but pose a serious burden to the rest of the economy.⁷⁶

Finally, the CED proposal created opposition by presenting solutions that would only heighten, rather than solve, the farm problem. Representative Johnson of Wisconsin asked, “would [the CED] program result in a decrease in farm surpluses, or would it simply mean that the remaining farmers would enlarge their farms and their scale of operation?”⁷⁷ James Patton of the National Farmers Union put it another way. “In the name of efficiency [CED members] want farmers to produce at a lower price but they neglect the fact that efficiency is one of the reasons for low farm prices and incomes.”⁷⁸ Carl Bruns of the National Association of Wheat Growers pointed out a problem in the CED proposal. According to Bruns, the CED assumed that a decline in farm numbers would result in a decline in agricultural production. In reality, farmland would not only remain in production, but would be farmed by more productive farmers, raising farm surpluses.⁷⁹ In voicing questionable solutions to the farm problem, the CED reminded Americans not only of the difficult problems resulting from the agricultural revolution and the failure of existing farm policy to solve these problems, but the fact that the post-war agricultural revolution created tensions between the underlying social values that informed farm policy. With the rapid loss in farm numbers and farm population, tremendous growth in corporate farms and revolutionary changes in the family farms that remained, farm policy could not simply be guided by the long held ideals of efficiency,

⁷⁶ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *CED Farm Program*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., (1962), 298.

⁷⁷ Lester Johnson, “Agriculture at the Crossroads,” Congressional Record---House 1962, found in File 1243, Clarence Cannon Papers, WHMC.

⁷⁸ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *CED Farm Program*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., (1962), 121.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 290.

productivity and technology. Instead, these post-war problems brought into consideration the idea of saving the family farm.

Some Americans responded negatively to the CED proposal perhaps because the CED stated what many knew had to happen in order for farm policy to again become guided by a coherent philosophy. One of two courses would have to occur. Either the family farm or efficiency and productivity would have to give. In this case, either farming would become an entirely industrial form accepted by the public or the government would stop further advances in farm technology to freeze in place the existence of the family farm as popularly imagined by many Americans, or as close to that image as possible. The first course would resolve the contradictions in farm policy by allowing the family farm to change to meet modern realities. It is this path that the CED pursued, but it was a path to which the public objected because it meant that farming would no longer look like the cultural ideal. W. Harold Brenton, a member of the Committee for Economic Development, offered an updated definition of the family farm, one that was not rooted in the past, but rather one that worked cohesively with the ideals of improved efficiency and productivity. The family farm, according to Brenton, was not “just a piece of farm land on which all workers [were] related.”⁸⁰ Instead, Brenton defined the family farm in more fluid terms.

It is a place where the family has the satisfaction of using its hands and minds to create a product that people want to consume, not a product that ends up in dead storage. If a farm has these qualities, it is a family farm, no matter how many acres it has.⁸¹

⁸⁰ “A Fresh Look at the Family Farm,” *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 11, 1962).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

For the family farm to survive, according to Brenton, “There will have to be fewer farms and they will have to be larger.”⁸² Americans were not that willing or quick, however, to allow their ideals to change to meet the realities of the post-war agricultural economy.

The public response to the withholding action of the National Farmers Organization, in the fall of 1962, allows further insight into the mixed and often contradictory attitudes held toward agriculture and the family farm resulting from the agricultural revolution. Organized in 1955, the National Farmers Organization (NFO) developed quickly among some Midwestern farmers out of a shared concern for the family farm and desire to take action to prevent further family farm losses in the face of a growing corporate presence.⁸³ The NFO also voiced frustration with the agricultural economy that prevented many family farms from seeing the income growth experienced by urban workers at this time.⁸⁴ Experiencing a rapid decline in farm numbers, growing corporate power in agriculture and continued failures on the part of farm policy to successfully address the farm problem, NFO members took it upon themselves through collective action to capture market power for family farmers for the sake of that celebrated institution. “We are seeing the liquidation of the family-sized farms of America,” noted Oren Lee Staley, President of the NFO, in 1956, “and any agricultural program must be designed to protect these farmers just as antitrust laws have protected the small-business man from being swallowed up by the large corporations.”⁸⁵ Their

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Austin Wehrwein, “Farmers Rename Staley as Head,” *New York Times* (Dec. 14, 1962).

⁸⁴ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 84th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: GPO, 1956), 354; and William Barry Furlong, “Union Man Down on the Farm,” *New York Times* (Sep. 16, 1962).

⁸⁵ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *General Farm Legislation*, 84th Cong., 2nd Sess., (1956), 356.

message resonated well with many farmers, swelling the ranks of the NFO to over 160,000 members within just a few years of getting organized and over 300,000 members, by some accounts, throughout 16 states by 1962.⁸⁶

NFO president, Oren Lee Staley, a hog farmer from Missouri, guided the upstart farm group, based out of Iowa and the center of hog, corn and wheat production areas, toward the idea of withholding actions as a means of forcing food processors to sign long term contracts for farm commodities.⁸⁷ Such contracts would do three things for member family farms. First, such contracts would smooth out the wide price fluctuations of the open commodity market that often became the source of problems for many farmers. Second, contracts would ensure a market for NFO member farmers, balancing the growing market power of corporate farms that often garnered more interest from processors because such large corporate farms could offer more products in uniform and higher qualities and often at lower prices. Third, such contracts seemed to promise the chance of raising family farm income, allowing farm families a way of possibly catching up to urban income levels.

NFO members turned to collective market action not necessarily out of the belief that it offered the best chance of success, but because farm policy had failed to stem the loss of farms and the farm population.⁸⁸ Withholding actions, while allowing farmers to take their own action for the sake of saving family farms, nonetheless offered the same

⁸⁶ “Wehrwein, “Farmers Rename Staley as Head,” *New York Times* (Dec. 14, 1962).

⁸⁷ Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies, and Manpower, *Farm Cost-Price Squeeze*, 87th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: PGO, 1961), 234-5.

⁸⁸ John T. Schlebecker, “The Great Holding Action,” *Agricultural History* (1965), 204; and Dennis Nordin and Roy V. Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: The Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 153-4.

limited potential for real success as had past government policies. Much like government farm policies created in the name of aiding the family farm but developed within the limits of larger societal values, withholding actions inherently offered little actual help to struggling smaller family farms, those which best fit the cultural ideal. Like tax deductions, price supports and conservation payments, contracts resulting from withholding actions would benefit farmers in proportion to the amount of a commodity produced. Moreover, withholding actions, like government policy, failed to negate, or in most cases, accentuated the differences in profitability of larger, more technologically adopted farms over their smaller, more labor intensive counterparts. A withholding action, much like price supports, simply shifted upward the price of a commodity. Those farmers who could produce at lower costs would still hold an advantage over their competitors and would, in the long term, drive out the less efficient.

As ineffective as withholding actions would prove to be in saving the family farm, the NFO and its membership pursued that course of action with total dedication.⁸⁹ This fact says two things. First, it shows the amount of stress and concern by NFO members for the family farm. Driven to desperation, NFO members were willing to try anything for the sake of their own survival and that of the family farm, especially after years of failed government policy and even if the proposed solution offered little realistic help.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Initially the NFO sought to affect change through government policy. In 1956, the NFO called on government to set price supports at 100% of parity, set floors on hog and cattle prices and establish reasonable production controls. All of these policies have been shown to have a negative impact on smaller farms the NFO sought to aid. The NFO did also, however, call on the government to investigate monopolistic marketing practices by processors, end all land reclamation projects while surpluses existed, and change the allotment formula from acres to bushels. All of these policies would have had some beneficial impact on smaller farmers, but would not have adhered to other societal values.

⁹⁰ William Blair, "Feed-Grain Plan Angers Farmers," *New York Times* (Oct. 23, 1962); and Luther Tweeten, *Foundations of Farm Policy*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 81.

This desperation would, in the years ahead, drive the NFO into extreme actions.⁹¹

Second, the NFO pursued withholding actions as opposed to other, more effective options because they at least partially fit with larger societal values. In the post-war period, labor union strikes had become an acceptable means of gaining workplace or marketplace influence, as long as they did not go too far. As Staley argued, the NFO members sought to “win the right to price their products the same way a clothing merchant prices his.”⁹² NFO withholding actions had some similarities with labor union strikes, but over the course of the 1962 withholding action events would show it was in fact its own unique case.

Born out of long-developing frustrations, the NFO withholding action plan originated at the 1961 NFO convention in December of 1961 and fully developed at the NFO meetings located in Des Moines, Iowa in mid-August of 1962. Responding to President Oren Lee Staley’s speech, the crowd of 20,000 NFO members roared with approval as Staley charged, “This is a battle for survival of family-type agriculture. The decisions we take here today are going to determine the future course of agriculture.”⁹³ The crowd also cheered when Staley attacked the Committee for Economic Development for suggesting the United States had too many farm people.⁹⁴ The NFO members in attendance voted overwhelmingly in support of a withholding action aimed not only at raising farm commodity prices, but to establish long-term contracting with food processors.

⁹¹ For a complete history of the NFO see Don Muhm, *The NFO: A Farm Belt Rebel: A History of the National Farmers Organization* (Lone Oak Press, 2000).

⁹² “The Farmers’ Haberdashery,” *Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 14, 1962).

⁹³ “Farm Group Votes to Keep its Products Off Market, Lift Prices,” *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 29, 1962).

⁹⁴ Donald Jansen, “Farmers in Midwest Call Strike for Higher Prices,” *New York Times* (Aug. 29, 1962).

The withholding action, scheduled to begin September 1st immediately following the Labor Day weekend, would focus strategically on cattle, hogs and sheep. Since processors could not keep large supplies of meat in stock, a strike by farmers of these commodities would provide almost immediate impact. Moreover, NFO membership was concentrated in those commodity areas.⁹⁵ With initial success established through cattle and hogs, the NFO planned to widen the withholding action to include milk, wheat, corn and soybeans to establish contracting in those commodities. The NFO, through withholding, sought to raise prices substantially to parity or levels members considered “fair” and that would provide income on a level with that received in nonfarm employment. The NFO sought to raise cattle prices from around \$29 per hundred pounds to \$32.45, hogs from around \$18 per hundred pounds to \$22.75 and lambs from \$22 per hundred pounds to \$29.45. The NFO also sought to raise corn from \$1.11 per bushel to \$1.49 and soybeans from \$2.54 a bushel to \$2.56.⁹⁶

It wasn't that farm prices were historically low. Instead, the NFO's decision for the withholding action seeking contracts and higher prices stemmed more from a frustration with price volatility and the failure of farm income to keep up with nonfarm income. In fact, beef prices were at a ten-year high the week before the strike and some hog cuts were selling at their highest in over five years.⁹⁷ Moreover, net farm income for 1962 was expected to hit over \$12 billion, the highest total since 1953.⁹⁸ In reality, few farms actually faced dire economic situations in 1962. The rural migration and farm

⁹⁵ Richard F. Janssen, “Farm Strike Flop?” *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 11, 1962).

⁹⁶ “Farm Group Votes to Keep its Products Off Market,” *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 29, 1962).

⁹⁷ “Farm Strike Cuts Supplies; Packers Lay Off Workers,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 7, 1962).

⁹⁸ William Barry Furlong, “Union Man Down on the Farm,” *New York Times* (Sep. 16, 1962).

decline continued mostly as a result of farm families seeking higher, more stable incomes. The main driver behind the NFO price demands was the general feeling among farmers that they were falling behind the rest of the nation in economic well-being.⁹⁹

While many farmers felt that frustration, relatively few beyond those in the NFO actually joined in the withholding action or offered support.¹⁰⁰ For the other major farm organizations, the NFO plan seemed misguided from a number of directions. The Farmers Union, while agreeing with the NFO in the need for action to save the family farm, nonetheless still believed in government policy as the best means to a solution. The NFU did eventually support the withholding action, but only half-heartedly as they continued to focus on lobbying for farm legislation that would better aid the family farm.¹⁰¹ The Farm Bureau, the largest and most politically influential farm organization, took a decided stance against the NFO and its withholding action. The Farm Bureau, often representing the largest and wealthiest farmers, held the same free market philosophy as that held by corporate and business leaders. The *Wall Street Journal*, representative of business ideals, argued any business refusing to offer their products at prices consumers were willing to pay would eventually be out of business.¹⁰² “We think no industry, whether it is the blacksmith or the ‘family farm’ or the railroads,” noted the *Wall Street Journal*, “can claim the right of indefinite preservation, beyond their economic usefulness.”¹⁰³ Farm Bureau President Charles Shuman concluded that strike

⁹⁹ Schlebecker, “The Great Holding Action,” *Agricultural History*, 206.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Janssen, “Farm Strike Flop?” *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 11, 1962).

¹⁰¹ Schlebecker, “The Great Holding Action,” *Agricultural History*, 209.

¹⁰² “The Farmers’ Haberdashery,” *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 14, 1962).

¹⁰³ “Cart Before the Iron Horse,” *Wall Street Journal* (March 21, 1961).

participants were “inclined to attribute his troubles to low market prices instead of to the fact that he and his undercapitalized farm [were] obsolete.”¹⁰⁴

Beyond differences in philosophy, the Farm Bureau opposed and other groups ignored the NFO withholding action also out of fear of losing members to the upstart NFO.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, farmers themselves could best serve their own individual interests by ignoring the strike. Farmers’ costs continued regardless of participation in the strike. For animal farmers, the costs of not selling animals at the right time produced particularly acute problems. Any withholding action would lose participants within weeks simply because few farmers could financially afford it. Not only did withholding farmers lose income during the withholding action, but their actions reduced commodity supplies, driving up the prices for those who did not participate and continued to sell. The withholding action was the ultimate free rider problem, one that doomed the strike to failure even before it began and would prove to add a level of anger and violence between farmers, adding further difficulty.

The NFO began its withholding action on Labor Day Weekend, starting September 1st. Starting on a three-day weekend gave a built-in advantage in that markets and processors were already shut down for an additional day, reducing supplies. The advantage of starting the strike over a three-day weekend was negated by farmers, including NFO members, selling off commodities in preparation for the strike. In the last day before the strike, stockyards experienced their heaviest flow of hogs and cattle in 14

¹⁰⁴ Edward Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1963), 74.

¹⁰⁵ Schlebecker, “The Great Holding Action,” *Agricultural History*, 205.

years.¹⁰⁶ Food processors similarly prepared for the impending strike, buying up as many hogs and cattle as possible, in hopes of outlasting the NFO action.¹⁰⁷ Despite the record supply of market animals the day before the strike, prices continued to climb to their highest in months.¹⁰⁸

Through the first week of the withholding action, the NFO saw dramatic success as hog and cattle shipments to processors fell a full 24 percent compared to the same week the previous year. Moreover, by the end of the week, hog supplies at stockyards had reached their lowest level in 15 years.¹⁰⁹ Hog and cattle prices then rose in response to low supplies. The NFO strategy of focusing on cattle and hogs appeared to be working. NFO leadership even claimed to have signed a long-term contract with one processor.¹¹⁰ By all signs, the withholding action was a success after one week. However, it would take more than one week of striking in order for the NFO to reach its goals. A number of problems arose, however, changing the direction of the withholding action.

As the price of hogs and cattle rose in response to reduced supplies, processors and retailers took actions that would turn the public's initial support into considerable opposition. At the start of the withholding action, the public voiced support for or indifference to the NFO cause. Some believed in saving the family farm while others no

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 208.

¹⁰⁷ Richard F. Janssen, "Farm Strike Flop?" *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 11, 1962).

¹⁰⁸ Tweeten, *Foundations of Farm Policy*, 81 and Schlebecker, "The Great Holding Action," *Agricultural History*, 208.

¹⁰⁹ Janssen, "Farm Strike Flop?" *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 11, 1962).

¹¹⁰ "First Pact Signed, Farm Leader Says," *New York Times* (Sep. 1, 1962).

longer worried over such matters.¹¹¹ That support faded quickly as processors laid off workers or reduced hours with the reduced flow of hogs and cattle.¹¹² Processors in Iowa and Wisconsin announced lay offs within days of the start of the strike. Retail prices soon rose as concerns of meat shortages took hold. Grocery stores began warning customers that meat would not be available if the strike continued.¹¹³ The fear exaggerated any reality of shortages and played into the hands of the processors seeking to discredit the NFO strike. Processor profits rose a full 70 percent between 1961 and 1962, almost entirely resulting from taking advantage of the NFO strike.¹¹⁴ Government regulatory officials similarly discredited grocery store price hikes attributed to any meat shortage.¹¹⁵ The NFO, to no avail, argued that processors had taken advantage of the situation to extort higher prices from consumers. The public had watched with great awareness the NFO holding action and for the most part were convinced the lack of supplies were to blame for higher prices. Many began to agree with the *Wall Street Journal* observation that “the ‘striking’ Midwest farmers are ganging up to extort higher prices from consumers.”¹¹⁶

Compounding the loss of public support resulting from higher retail meat prices, news of farm violence erupting between NFO withholding farmers and farmers determined to continue to sell their stock gave the NFO strike a black eye. News of

¹¹¹ Schlebecker, “The Great Holding Action,” *Agricultural History*, 207 and Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 85. Higbee quotes Lauren Soth, editor of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*. “Now that this cherished institution is losing its membership so rapidly the American mind is distressed.” (85)

¹¹² “Farm Strike Cuts Supplies; Packers Lay Off Workers,” *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 7, 1962).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Schlebecker, “The Great Holding Action,” *Agricultural History*, 212.

¹¹⁵ “City Aide Charges Meat Profiteering, Alerts Housewives,” *New York Times* (Sep. 11, 1962).

¹¹⁶ “The Farmers Haberdashery,” *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 14, 1962).

nonviolent efforts by NFO farmers to shut down livestock auctions with protest or close roads to sale barns was quickly overshadowed by reports of such efforts turning violent. News of cancellation of the weekly livestock auction in Palmyra, Missouri and other locations after auctioneers could not conduct sales over the shouts and hand clapping of NFO farmers was overshadowed by reports of non-NFO farmers being greeted by angry mobs or sticks of dynamite in their driveway or barn.¹¹⁷ As farmers slowly returned to shipping cattle and hogs over the next three weeks of the strike, news stories of violence and physical threats continued, producing a sense of the hopelessness of the NFO struggle. By the third week of the strike cattle and hog shipments had risen considerably compared to the first few days of the strike, yet remained below typical levels of shipments.¹¹⁸

By the fourth week of the strike any NFO effort to bolster the strike by adding milk to the list of withheld commodities could not overcome the declining public support for the strike in light of rising consumer prices and reports of violence. On October 2nd, one month after initiating the withholding action, NFO leader Oren Lee Staley declared a recess from the action, leaving open the possibility of resuming the strike at a moment's notice. In reality, declaring a recess provided a public relations move which allowed the NFO to avoid declaring the strike a total failure. By all accounts the withholding action yielded no positive results. The strike never resumed that year, commodity prices returned to normal levels and the NFO managed to sign only a few small contracts.

¹¹⁷ Schlebecker, "The Great Holding Action," *Agricultural History*, 209; Austin Wehrwein, "Farmers are Preparing to Bolster Strike by Withholding Grain," *New York Times* (Sep. 12, 1962); and "Farmers Warned Against Violence," *New York Times* (Sep. 5, 1962). At Colchester, Illinois, 400 NFO women stopped a livestock auction by singing "God Bless America," clapping their hands, and shouting. Muhm, *The NFO, A Farm Belt Rebel*, 65.

¹¹⁸ "Cattle and Hog Shipments Climb Despite Strike," *Wall Street Journal* (Sep. 12, 1962).

Moreover, the NFO strike created divisions among farmers, created bad publicity for the NFO and its cause to save the family farm, and in fact created negative public opinions of farmers seeking higher prices when in fact they were some of the only businessmen to enjoy a federally created and enforced floor on prices. The NFO withholding action only heightened public frustration with federal farm program costs that, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, had risen to the third largest regular item in the federal budget even though the farm population fell almost in half over this time.¹¹⁹

Saving the family farm may have been an important value to many Americans, but it was not so important as to warrant higher consumer costs, large federal budget costs, and seemingly preferential treatment for a declining portion of the population. Moreover, the NFO actions drove further distinctions in the minds of many Americans between the reality of modern agriculture and the historical ideal of the family farm. Many NFO producers not only looked nothing like the historical ideal held by many Americans, but their quest for market monopolization only added to the idea that modern farming failed to look like the ideal. The goal of market monopolization stood in stark contrast to characteristics of the ideal the NFO intended to preserve, the family farm.

A number of other events in 1962 encapsulate changes associated with the post-war agricultural revolution, the changes in public attitudes about farming and family farms, and indicate a continuation of these trends into the remainder of the 20th century. In September of that year, Congress passed the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962. In some ways the 1962 farm bill did little to change farm policy, but in others it signified a change in direction, at least in policy goals, in response to the changing public attitude

¹¹⁹ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 121. In 1962, agricultural price and income stabilization cost over \$6 billion. See Geoffrey S. Shepherd, *Farm Policy: New Directions* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1964), 3.

toward agriculture and the growing disconnect between the reality of farming and the ideal held by the public. On the one hand, the farm bill maintained the policy tools of parity and price supports, both of which were rooted in larger societal ideals that valued productivity and the implementation of technology. Such policies continued to work against the public concern for the disappearing smaller family farm.

On the other hand, the 1962 farm bill introduced a number of policy goals that marked a change in philosophy toward the role of agriculture in cultural life. The mass rural-to-urban migration coupled with the enforcement of reapportionment resulted in a shift in political power away from farm people and toward urban and suburban residents worried about food costs and taxes. Moreover, by 1962 voters were losing sympathy for farm interests.¹²⁰ *Wallace's Farmer* concluded that "With this new 'partner' aboard, farm legislation must be drawn more carefully."¹²¹ In light of this recent change, the 1962 farm bill changed federal milk policy to allow the Secretary of Agriculture to suspend marketing orders, a type of farm subsidy, if "consumer interests are not being protected by reason of excessive prices...or an inadequate supply."¹²² The growing problems of urban areas, blight, crime, unemployment, infrastructure and racial tensions similarly led many Americans to question the continued focus on the family farm. The clear political needs associated with these urban problems led many to agree with Edward Higbee when

¹²⁰ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 134.

¹²¹ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 134-5. Higbee quotes *Wallace's Farmer*. James T. Bonnen, "Observations on the Changing Nature of National Agricultural Policy Decision Processes, 1946-76," *Farmers, Bureaucrats, and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture*, Trudy Huskamp Peterson, ed. (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980), 322. Bonnen notes that by the 1960s "Major agricultural legislation cannot now be enacted in the House of Representatives without at least the tacit support of labor and consumer interests in the coalition." (322)

¹²² Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Food and Agriculture Act of 1962*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: GPO, 1962), 38.

he concluded that “Certainly the democratic way of life is more threatened by growing urban slums than it is by the decline of the undercapitalized family farm.”¹²³

In order to continue justification of price supports to a declining farm population, the Kennedy Administration redefined the purposes of farm programs to focus less on preservation of farm income and more toward benefits all people, not just farmers, could experience from maintaining good farming techniques. The 1962 bill committed substantial federal funding and USDA personnel toward the development of recreation facilities, parks or conservation areas from farmland.¹²⁴ Shifting the focus toward conservation and recreation opened the door to changes in farm policy that could entirely ignore the family farm issue. The language from the 1962 act called on reasonable payments and assistance to all producers in return for conservation and recreation development.¹²⁵ Moreover, the 1962 act reinforced the ideal of finding the most economic use of land, which could include public recreation.¹²⁶ Similarly, President Kennedy sought to enforce mandatory production controls as a means of curtailing surplus production. While such controls would have potentially resolved the surplus commodity problem, the idea of limiting production was met with sharp criticism. So sharp, in fact, that no other president would ever attempt to pursue mandatory controls.¹²⁷

¹²³ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 139.

¹²⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Rural Areas Development Newsletter* (Nov. 1962), found in File 284, Stanley Fike Papers, WHMC.

¹²⁵ Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Food and Agriculture Act of 1962*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: GPO, 1962), 46.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 35.

¹²⁷ James N. Giglio, “New Frontier Agricultural Policy: The Commodity Side, 1961-1963,” *Agricultural History* 61 (Summer 1987), 69.

In a key symbolic gesture, the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act did not include language that existed in the 1961 Agricultural Act. Omitted from the 1962 act was the statement that the U.S. government recognizes “the importance of the family farm as an efficient unit of production” and that the Federal government would “encourage, promote, and strengthen this form of farm enterprise.”¹²⁸ Granted, this language would periodically return to farm legislation, particularly in the 1980s with the farm debt crisis, but taken at this time it signifies a clear rejection of a policy goal in preference of other, more acceptable goals.

Not only did the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act reject the language of preserving the family farm, it in fact established two programs that would aid the outflow of rural migrants, perpetuating the decline of family farms. The Area Redevelopment Act provided \$394 million in federal aid to rural areas to fund employment and industry programs. Similarly, the Manpower Development and Training Act provided \$435 million for training programs to help unemployed people develop skills to obtain jobs. This program specifically outlined that a preference be given to members of farm families with income under \$1200 per year.¹²⁹ Much like President Eisenhower’s Rural Development program, the Area Redevelopment Act sought to open new employment opportunities for unemployed or underemployed rural family farmers rather than find ways to keep them on the farm. The *Wall Street Journal* called Kennedy’s farm plan “a radical departure from previous Government policy” that suggested “a variety of ways for

¹²⁸ Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Food and Agriculture Act of 1962*, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1962), 268. James Patton, President of the National Farmers Union called on the Federal government to recommit to the philosophy outlined in the 1961 act, but the final version of the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act included no such language.

¹²⁹U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Readjustment of Rural Resources and People,” (1963), found in File 284, Stanley Fike Papers, WHMC.

eliminating inefficient and marginal farms, encouraging more farmers to pursue new occupations, and converting poor cropland into game refuges, forests, and the like.”¹³⁰

Another law passed in 1962 signified the growing popular view that farming had become a business like any other, thus deserving of no special treatment. The Revenue Act of 1962 required farm cooperatives to return at least 20 percent of a patron’s refund in the form of a cash payment so that the patron could then pay the tax on the remaining noncash allocation. If the patron did not allow the farm coop to return a portion in cash, in other words the patron required that the coop retain the entire allocation, the cooperative would pay the tax on that allocation at the much higher corporate tax rate.¹³¹ Marking the popular frustration with the unequal treatment afforded to farm businesses over their competitors, *Reader’s Digest*, early in 1962, published an article criticizing the special treatment of farm cooperatives.¹³² In it the author outlined the unfairness of different tax codes for competing businesses. A conclusion with which President Kennedy agreed, “Just treatment for all businesses...should be the main objective.”¹³³

And yet, despite these changes in popular opinion and farm policy that began to recognize the transformation of farming into a business and the preference of efficiency and productivity, favorable popular opinion toward the idea of the family farm continued. It seems that as farm numbers declined and family farms became less of a reality the public clamored all the more for that revered cultural ideal. In other words, as farming

¹³⁰ “Administration to Push Broad New Farm Plan,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 2, 1962).

¹³¹ John A. Baker to Paul C. Jones, August 11, 1964, found in File 2545, Paul C. Jones Papers, WHMC. John Baker was the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture under President Kennedy.

¹³² O.K. Armstrong, “Why Should These Co-ops Enjoy Special Tax Privileges?” *Reader’s Digest* (Feb. 1962), 72.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

became increasingly industrialized Americans believed agriculture increasingly failed to fit the image of family farming, leading people to increasingly press for drastic reductions in federal farm program expenditures. In light of this trend, Americans increasingly believed in the family farm, even if fewer farms fit popular expectations. In March of 1962, NBC aired a documentary entitled “The Land.” The highly-viewed documentary covered the increasing difficulty many farmers faced and, in particular, the decline of the family farm. While praising efficient production, Chet Huntley, long-time NBC newscaster and narrator for the documentary, also voiced concern for the declining farm population.¹³⁴ Preservation of the family farm through increased public awareness and better farm policy provided the underlying theme throughout the documentary. The popularity of the documentary indicated the public was not yet willing to give up on the idea of the family farm, even if they valued policies aiding large production, questioned much of the special treatment or uniqueness afforded family farms, and perceived little difference between farm and city life.

Confronted with the realities brought about by a technological revolution in agriculture and the associated changes in public opinion about farming, organizers of the Second Conference on Goals and Values in Agriculture occurred in Des Moines, Iowa in February of 1963 asking two poignant questions. Is rural life inherently superior? And is it worth saving or have family farms become a business?¹³⁵ After extensive discussion, participants concluded that “while the rural community is capable of producing a good

¹³⁴ Wayne Rohrer and Louis Douglas, *The Agrarian Transition in America: Dualism and Change* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 73-4.

¹³⁵ *Farm Goals in Conflict: Family Farm, Income, Freedom, Security* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1963), 1.

life, it would be a mistake to consider it as superior to other types of communities.”¹³⁶

The conference participants’ incomplete answer mirrored the mixed ideas held by the American people toward the family farm at this time.

The new reality of post-World War II farming, revolutionized by technology, led many to question the fundamental idea of the inherent superiority of farming and thus to question many policies geared toward its preservation. Farming had become no different from any other business. In 1954 the federal government extended Social Security to farm people. In 1961, the Farm Bureau and the National Farmers Union together spent more on lobbying than the American Medical Association and both farm organizations were in the top 10 for most money spent in lobbying efforts.¹³⁷ Changes in federal tax laws in 1962 treated farm cooperatives the same as any other business. Post-war technological conveniences had expanded to rural America in this period making farm living similar to urban and suburban living. Farm children went to consolidated schools and chose vocations just as their non-farm classmates did.¹³⁸ One observer at the time concluded

There is no point in trying to keep alive the old shopworn concept of the family farm when the real character of the family farm has drastically changed from a labor institution to a business capital institution and the number of farm families is about half of what it was a quarter of a century ago.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹³⁷ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 140.

¹³⁸ Don Paarlberg, “Agriculture Loses Its Uniqueness,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 60 (Dec. 1978), 771.

¹³⁹ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 142-3.

Moreover, the development of part-time farming and extension of urban living into rural areas destroyed any distinctions between farm and non-farm.¹⁴⁰ Yet, because the ideal family farm appeared to many people to be disappearing and because it represented so many long-held American ideals, people also could not bring themselves to disregard the family farm. Many still held the federal government to a standard of aiding the ideal family farm.¹⁴¹ To many, the family farm held importance if simply because it became increasingly rare.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Durost and Warren R. Bailey, "What's Happened to Farming," *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences, and Alternatives* (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 19.

¹⁴¹ Opinion Research Corporation, *Report to Business Executives: What Voters Think of the Administration...Early in the 1956 Campaign: Tabular Supplement* 14 n. 5 (May 1956), A-1, found in Box 7, File: Public Opinion Index-1956 Campaign, Citizens for Eisenhower Records, Eisenhower Library. Again, going back to this public opinion poll discussed in depth in chapter 5, one of the few polls that provides insight into Americans' views of farm issues and the loss of farms, one may read this poll as an indication of popular desire for policy solutions to the loss of family farms.

Conclusion: Americans Nostalgic for the Rural Past

As the 20th century progressed, the post-war technological revolution in agriculture continued, perpetuating farm population loss and farm changes that had been so revolutionary in the 1940s and 1950s. One example of the magnitude of the agricultural revolution lies in the change in fertilizer use. In 1945, American farmers applied 45,000 tons of nitrogen to corn fields. In 1980, they applied 4 million tons.¹ As those trends persisted, so too did the mixed relationship Americans had with the family farm. On the one hand people continued to experience frustration with high farm program costs and the lack of policies that provided help to the ideal family farm. Yet, on the other hand, the developments in agriculture and the policies enacted often fulfilled larger societal values, raising productivity and efficiency, often through the use of technology, which Americans found so important.

The 1960s and 70s marked a period of rapid growth of contract farming as vertical integration and corporate influences spread into all corners of agriculture. In this system, a food processing corporation such as Tyson provided all supplies to a farmer who would provide the land, buildings and labor. The two parties agreed on a price for the final product. In essence, farmers lost all independence and became simply hired laborers. Many farms that resembled the popular notion of a family farm, particularly in poultry and hogs, had now become just another part of the corporate-controlled food

¹ Dennis S. Nordin and Roy V. Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: the Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 137.

supply chain.² In order to find long-sought after stability in costs and income, farmers contracted with food corporations at the start of a season or long before the final product was actually produced. Even with some fixed costs and income, the farmer still had to pursue efficiency in his work to maximize his income just to survive. Stories abound of corporations cutting contract values after farmers invested thousands of dollars to update their facilities to meet corporate demands. For many farm families, contracting yielded the same results as independent farming, low income and a cost-price squeeze.

Despite the new option and stability contract farming provided, the technological treadmill and cost-price squeeze continued, driving out farmers every year except a few in the mid-1970s when farm prices jumped as a result of unexpected , but temporary foreign demand. Frustrated with the squeeze and the continued loss of family farms, around 100,000 farmers joined the American Agriculture Movement (AAM) and protested for higher government support prices in the late 1970s. To take their message to the people and the government, 50,000 members of AAM drove their tractors to Washington D.C. Initially the public supported their goals as the public was also weary of continued losses of family farms.

Quickly however, the public turned against the movement. The reality of a farmer driving a massive four-wheel drive, 15-ton, air conditioned cab, \$60,000 tractor asking for more government aid and claiming to represent family farms clashed with the image the public held of the family farm. Wendell Berry's popular book, *The Unsettling of America*, published in 1977, educated readers about the modern workings of

² Nordin and Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur*, 157. As part of their argument on changes in Midwestern agriculture in the 20th century Nordin and Scott conclude similarly that "By 1970, the North Central region's successful farmers were specialists who had mastered both the agricultural and entrepreneurial aspects of their primary production." (157)

agriculture. “An incredible parade of machines are at work today on U.S. farms,” noted Berry, “self-propelled combines that permit a man to ride in an air-conditioned cab to harvest a crop of corn that used to take a crew of 80 hands. Berry described modern farm equipment as “Monster road-building machinery to level terraces or shape rice fields.”³ AAM farmers had abused the idea of the family farm, helping lead to the declining credibility of that symbol.⁴ As one farm policy observer noted, “Agriculture’s play on the sympathy of the American people can be expected to backfire, sooner or later, as the stark contrast between the agrarian myth and the contemporary reality of agriculture begins to dawn more fully.”⁵ To the nonfarming public, the protesting farmers looked like businessmen with more money sunk into one piece of equipment than most people had paid for their house. President Carter’s Secretary of Agriculture, Bob Bergland, supposedly farmers’ biggest ally in government, called them greedy.⁶ The fact that by the 1980s, farm families were wealthier than non-farm families in terms of total net worth, not just in income certainly did not help the farmers’ image.⁷

³ Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, 1977), 60-1.

⁴ Grace Skogstad, “Ideas, Paradigms and Institutions: Agricultural Exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration* 11 (Oct. 1998), 470 and Roger Cobb and Charles Elder, *Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 128 and 133. Cobb and Elder point out that the loss of symbols or their misuse could pose legitimacy issues for special interests seeking to build public support for their cause.

⁵ Paul B. Thompson, “The Philosophical Rationale for U.S. Agricultural Policy,” in *U.S. Agriculture in a Global Setting* (1988), 44.

⁶ Seth S. King, “Farm Protest March: A Strategic Disaster,” *New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1979).

⁷ Kristen Allen and Barbara J. Elliott, “The Current Debate and Economic Rationale for U.S. Agricultural Policy,” in *U.S. Agriculture in a Global Setting: An Agenda for the Future* (Washington: National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy, 1988), 29.

The farm debt crisis of the 1980s highlighted another moment in history in which the cost-price squeeze and technological treadmill intensified their effect on farmers, causing a brief rise in popular concern. As farmers took on debt to purchase acreage or equipment to improve their efficiency and survivability, the combination of low market prices and rising interest rates led to a disproportionate number of farm foreclosures in the mid-1980s. The public rallied around the ideal of the family farm. Hollywood produced a number of films depicting the difficulty and stress farm families faced. The American public attended fund-raising concerts by Willie Nelson in hopes of saving what appeared to be farms that most closely resembled the cultural ideal. Surveys conducted in the midst of 1980s farm debt crisis revealed not only broad support for the family farm and support for continuation of costly farm programs, but a willingness on the part of a majority of non-farmers to pay higher taxes to fund aid programs for just 2 percent of the population.⁸

When farmers had become such a small percentage of the population and most people believed farmers had become just another form of big business the continuation of farm price supports stands as a political anomaly needing explanation.⁹ In other words, as journalist Robert K. Landers noted, “The days of preserving the family farm are gone,” nonetheless, Americans were still attached to the idea.¹⁰ One explanation is that

⁸ James Krohe, Jr., “Family-Farm Hogwash,” *Across the Board* 22 (May 1985), 3; William Robbins, “Surge in Sympathy for Farmer Found,” *New York Times* (Feb. 25, 1986) and Gary Mucciarconi, “Problem Definition and Special Interest Politics in Tax Policy and Agriculture,” in *Farmers, Bureaucrats, and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture*, ed. Trudy Huskamp Peterson (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980), 134.

⁹ “The Big Farmers and the Little Folks,” *New York Times* (Dec. 8, 1984). This article concluded that many of the 3% of the population living on farms “are big businessmen.”

¹⁰ Robert K. Landers, “Should Family Farms Be Saved?” *Editorial Research Reports* (May 6, 1988), 235.

nonfarmers did not necessarily see substantial benefits from opposing farm programs. Costs are dispersed among a large population; few people experienced large individual costs to maintaining farm programs that directly benefit a small group.¹¹ A second answer is that nonfarmers saw the value of a stable food supply produced in a harsh and unpredictable environment, regardless of what type of agriculture produces that food.¹² In that sense, many nonfarmers saw how farm programs benefit themselves, and not just a small group of big business owners.

A third answer is that many people continued to support farm programs, often in the name of family farms, even if they did not see modern farming living up to their ideals if simply because many believed that some farms still existed that fit their preconceived notions of family farms based on historical images of farming.¹³ For many Americans, even if most modern farms did not adhere to the historical ideal of family farms, there were a few farms that still fit the ideal. Moreover, at least farm people lived on the land, something many urban and suburban Americans yearned for.¹⁴ This fact proved true especially for the farm-born adults who migrated to urban areas and who, by 1965, outnumbered farm-born adults still living on farms.¹⁵ For this group in particular,

¹¹ Milton C. Hallberg, *Economic Trends in U.S. Agriculture and Food Systems Since World War II* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2001), 10-11 and Willard W. Cochrane, *The City Man's Guide to the Farm Problem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 154.

¹² Harold F. Breimyer, "The Decline of the Family Farm," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 34 (1982), 3.

¹³ James Krohe, Jr., "Family-Farm Hogwash," 3 and Donald Durost and Warren R. Bailey, "What's Happened to Farming," in *Change in Rural America: Causes, Consequences, and Alternatives* (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1978), 15. Durost and Bailey note "Some folk imagine farming is still [in the 1920s]." (15).

¹⁴ Bruce Chapman, "Farming Small," *New York Times* (Dec. 16, 1981). Chapman noted "Public opinion polls consistently show that most people would prefer to live in a small town or rural area if they could."

¹⁵ Luther Tweeten, *Foundations of Farm Policy*, 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 45.

the family farm stood as a nostalgic image of their childhoods, of what seemed like a simpler time. For most people, the family farm provided a symbol of what once served as a fact, a large portion of the population working the land with family. The public perpetuated the symbol of the family farm, and policies enacted in the name of that symbol, in order to remind *themselves* of these virtues.¹⁶ Journalist James Krohe, Jr. perhaps best explained the continuation of family farm rhetoric after farming had dramatically changed.

One of the reasons that farm rhetoric is so durable, so immune to correction, is that everyone wants so badly to believe it. We generally praise virtues the most when we practice them the least.¹⁷

Historian Richard Hofstadter put it another way.

The more farming as a self-sufficient way of life was abandoned for farming as a business, the more merit men found in what was being left behind. And the more rapidly the farmer's sons moved into the towns, the more nostalgic the whole culture became about its rural past.¹⁸

Not only had Americans sought to hang onto the family farm ideal, but through the 1980s the outside threat to the family farm, namely the Soviet collective farms, continued to exist and to cause Americans to celebrate institutions that not only differentiated themselves from the Soviets, but also highlighted the values Americans believed in and sought to present to the rest of the world. The fallout from the 1980s

¹⁶ Paul B. Thompson, "The Philosophical Rationale for U.S. Agricultural Policy," in *Agriculture in a Global Setting: An Agenda for the Future* (Washington: National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy, 1988), 39 and David Moberg, "Should We Save the Family Farm," *Dissent* 35 (Spring 1988), 202. In *American Agriculture and Farm Policy Since 1900*, Gilbert Fite noted that "Farmers may not have the peculiar virtues ascribed to them by Thomas Jefferson, but many Americans still *think* they make up an important bulwark of freedom and democracy." (26-7).

¹⁷ James Krohe, Jr., "Hollywood's Myth Makers Peddle Family Farm Hogwash," *Wall Street Journal* (May 23, 1985).

¹⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 33.

farm debt crisis combined in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War to change the political environment of farm policy formation.¹⁹

From the late 1940s until the early 1990s, saving the family farm became one of the goals of federal farm policy that typically received more focus in times of farm crisis. One result of the farm debt crisis was the perception on the part of many Americans that family farms no longer existed in the present, but only in the past. This final cost-price squeeze and speed up of the technological treadmill had finally pushed out the last remaining family farms. Moreover, the Tax Reform Act of 1986, passed at the height of the farm debt crisis, prohibited non-farmers from investing in farming as a means of offsetting taxes on income.²⁰ This act effectively ended the concern that family farmers faced unnecessary competition from corporate farms designed to lose money for wealthy investors. The end of the Cold War marked the end of an international threat to family farms, removing the need for American policy leaders to defend it from some unclear outside threat or the need to use the family farm as a foreign policy tool to gain the alliance of nations around the world in the battle against communism. The family farm had lost its foreign threat, but it had also disappeared, many perceived, from the reality of American agriculture. There was nothing to protect it from, and nothing left to protect. There was now only an ideal to strive toward, an ideal rooted in the past that failed to keep up with the realities of post-World War II agriculture.

¹⁹ Near the end of the Soviet Union President Gorbachev initiated a plan to create opportunities for family farming, clearly marking the end of the threat of collective farming posed to American-style family farming. See: Francis X. Clines, "Gorbachev Plan for Family Farm is Approved by Soviet Lawmakers," *New York Times* (March 1, 1990) and John H. Hodgson, "Soviet Citizens Like Idea of Family Farm," *New York Times* (April 2, 1990).

²⁰ E.C. Pasour, Jr. and Randal R. Rucker, *Plowshares and Pork Barrels: The Political Economy of Agriculture* (Oakland: The Independent Institute, 2005), 300.

The growing divide between the image and reality of farming has held significant consequences for American society. By holding onto these historical images Americans have become increasingly disconnected from the realities of modern agriculture. One recent survey of New York City residents revealed a deep void of knowledge of farming and the origins of their food.²¹ This lack of knowledge of modern agriculture has been perpetuated, particularly in advertising that commodifies the agrarian myth and family farm in order to make products more appealing to consumers, and has further led to the misrepresentation of modern rural life and the industrialization that has occurred in every link of the food supply chain.²² As Wendell Barry noted, “The split between what we think and what we do is profound.”²³ This is not by accident, but rather a psychological effort by many consumers to make themselves feel good about their purchases. Many want to believe that their actions perpetuate their perceived notion of the family farm, one based on images from the past.²⁴

By the start of the 21st century, the rhetoric of the family farm had almost entirely diminished from farm policy debate. Policy directives to save a particular type of farming have disappeared from federal farm bills. Moreover, debate regarding this sacred, but historically based institution had been almost entirely replaced by concerns for all of American farmers struggling with competition in the new global marketplace. The 2004 Republican Party Platform included one reference to the family farm, calling

²¹ Kevin Fleming, “Ag IQ Lags in the Big Apple,” *Successful Farming* (Sept. 2006). Many of the urbanites surveyed did not know what a combine was or roughly how much one costs, what soybeans looked like, and generally were way off on market prices farmers received for corn and soybeans.

²² Robert Goldman and David R. Dickens, “The Selling of Rural America,” *Rural Sociology* 48 (1983), 586-7.

²³ Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 18.

²⁴ Goldman and Dickens, “The Selling of Rural America,” 585.

for the end to the estate tax in the name of small businesses and family farms. Within that context clearly Republicans believe family farms to be either multi-million dollar businesses that qualify for the estate tax, or simply an icon on which to call in the name of non-farm related policy goals. The Republican platform held no reference to the family farm in its agriculture plank. The 2004 Democratic platform failed to include a single reference to the family farm. This does not preclude the use of “family farm” within politics; however it indicates its declining influence as a real issue or as a rhetorical tool.

The rise of sustainable and organic farming and community supported agriculture at the beginning of the 21st century is partly rooted in the idea of the family farm and stands as a challenge to industrial agriculture that has come to dominate the reality of farming. Patrons of farmers markets and community supported agriculture seek not only a healthy food source and a personal connection to that source, they also believe in supporting farms that look much like the historical ideal of the family farm. Walking through the Columbia [Missouri] Farmers Market, held between the months of April and November, one will find not only quality organic and sustainably-derived foods, but pictures and descriptions of the farms from which the food came. These descriptions and pictures, while often marketing tools for the purpose of selling more goods, nonetheless appeal to customers through the idea of the family farm. One will note from the images found at the Columbia Farmers Market and others like it across the United States that the popular idea of the family farm, while still alive, nonetheless rarely includes modern industrial methods as part of the concept. Americans today see farms as either family or

industrial, but rarely both. In reality, family farms may also be industrialized. A fact that farm people easily agree with but many non-farmers have difficulty accepting.

For a large portion of the post-World War II period, the family farm provided an important symbol through which Americans dealt with the farm technology revolution, the stresses of the Cold War and the social upheavals brought on by the massive rural-to-urban migration. The family farm symbol became projected onto the past at this time as a means of adding credence to its cause, of making it seem as having been a long-held American belief.²⁵ The fact that the agrarian myth, the basis for family farm rhetoric, already existed in America's past made the projection all the more easier and readily acceptable. By the 21st century, the family farm has become an ideal firmly rooted in the past; much like that sign of protest put up long ago along Interstate 72 near mile marker 28 in western Illinois. And as quickly as drivers today heading west on I-72 take notice of the sign it fades from view and becomes only an image in the rear view mirror, an image encapsulated in time, much like the popular image of the family farm and ideals for contemporary agriculture. Many Americans hold onto this historical and outdated image of farming much like they notice that worn out farm protest sign despite the fact that the sign is obviously out of date and posted less than a half-mile from a large confined animal feeding operation (CAFO) and within a farming landscape clearly manipulated by modern commercial and industrial farming techniques.

²⁵ Harvey Kaye, *Why Ruling Classes Fear History and Other Questions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) notes the ways in which present needs dictate the past, the telling of the past, and how the past is manipulated for the needs of various groups in the present.

Appendix

Farms, Total Acres Farmed, and Average Farm Size in the United States, 1900-2000.¹

Year	Farms (1,000)	Total acres (1,000,000)	Average acres per farm
1900	5,740	841	147
1905	NA	NA	NA
1910	6,406	881	138
1915	6,458	917	142
1920	6,518	959	147
1925	6,471	924	143
1930	6,546	990	151
1935	6,814	1,055	155
1940	6,350	1,065	168
1945	5,967	1,142	191
1950	5,648	1,161	206
1955	4,654	1,202	258
1960	3,963	1,177	297
1965	3,356	1,140	340
1970	2,949	1,103	374
1975	2,521	1,059	420
1980	2,440	1,039	426
1985	2,293	1,012	441
1990	2,146	987	460
1995	2,196	963	438
2000	2,172	943	434

¹ Data taken from *No. HS-44. Agriculture—Farms, Acreage, Income, and Foreign Trade: 1900-2002*. <http://www.census.gov/stata6/hist/HS-44.pdf>. Accessed November 27, 2007.

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