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

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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.