

The Family Farmers' Advocate: South Dakota Farmers Union, 1914–2000, by Lynwood E. Oyos. Sioux Falls: Center for Western Studies, 2000. viii, 392 pp. Illustrations, table, map, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$15.95 paper.

Reviewer Kimberly K. Porter is associate professor of history at the University of North Dakota. Her research interests include agriculture, the Midwest, and oral history, with a particular focus on the early years of the Iowa Farm Bureau.

For Lynwood E. Oyos, professor emeritus of history at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and author of numerous volumes explicating the history of his state, the enemies facing agriculture are multitudinous. Agencies and organizations that stand between South Dakota's family farmers and a "fair shake" include hostile presidential administrations, continued urbanization, and corporations bent on controlling all aspects of the farm economy (production, processing, prices, and marketing), as well as changing technology and the nation's financial system.

Just as the foes of agrarian democracy are clear, so are its protectors, according to Oyos. Institutions and individuals intent on preserving the family farm must rise to the challenge if Jefferson's dream is to prevail. Consequently, Oyos is determined to tell the story of one organization's fight in this epic battle, and to gain recruits along the way. "Readers of this work," he announces, "will discover how the South Dakota Farmers Union has confronted . . . changes in American society and how it has responded to the challenges of corporate dominance. The task has not been easy, but Union members have never wavered in their efforts to advocate and secure a better economic and social future for family farmers" (xii–xiii).

In 22 thematic chapters, chronologically framed, Oyos sets forth the labors of the SDFU from 1914 through 2000. He is at his best in describing the challenges facing the SDFU, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, and again in the 1980s and 1990s. In chapters 3–5, readers confront grasshopper plagues, plummeting prices, increasing taxation, black blizzards, penny auctions, and farm abandonment. The struggle is palpable as SDFU members and leaders seek to maintain the position of farmers in an ever urbanizing world. Oyos also effectively contextualizes the frustrating circumstances in which farmers found themselves enmeshed during those troublesome decades.

Similarly, Oyos tackles the more recent farm crisis in chapters 18–22, where he details the SDFU's efforts to provide a voice for family farmers in the face of federal legislation bent upon improving the position of corporate cultivators, and the seeming destruction of the agriculturalists upon whom the nation's future rests. The tales Oyos pro-

vides for consideration throughout the text are not ones of particular woe, but rather of advocacy, legislation, education, and cooperation, ultimately proactive stances against the foe.

Based on extensive archival research in the SDFU's collections, as well as numerous oral interviews and a detailed reading of the *Union Farmer*, Oyos's labors will be most interesting and valuable to those already familiar with the organization he chronicles. His text, rife with photographs, will serve as a trip down memory lane for South Dakotans. Names such as John W. Batcheller, Ben Radcliffe, Minnie Lovenger, and Teresa Schlenker ("the singing cowgirl" of station KWAT-Watertown) will undoubtedly strike a chord and bring a smile. More useful to such readers are the appendixes detailing leaders and members over the previous eight decades, albeit with significant curious omissions for more recent years.

Unfortunately, Oyos's text suffers from a degree of polemic in his discussions of such organizations and institutions as the Farm Bureau, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and corporate agriculture. It also bears the burden of rather poor editing. In light of the polemic, as well as the tight focus, general readers of agricultural and regional history will undoubtedly find the book somewhat unsatisfactory. However, scholars of farm organizations, students of South Dakota history, and members of the SDFU will find considerable food for thought.

Changing Works: Visions of a Lost Agriculture, by Douglas Harper. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. xii, 302 pp. Photographs, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Douglas Hurt is professor and director of the graduate program in agricultural history and rural studies at Iowa State University. He is the author of many books and articles on agricultural history.

Farming is no longer a way of life; it is a business. The agricultural population has dropped below 2 percent of the national population and, during most of the twentieth century, the number of farms has decreased while their size has increased. Agriculture is a capital-intensive, specialty business for most farmers (excluding specific groups such as hobby farmers and the Amish). By the late twentieth century, some scholars, particularly sociologists and historians, bemoaned change in American agriculture, particularly in rural values, which they usually asserted rather than defined. Now, in the early twenty-first century, these scholars continue to speak about the loss of community, neighborliness, and cooperation in the countryside due to technological and scientific change and the demands of a market

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.