

The Midwest Farmer's Daughter: In Search of an American Icon, by Zachary Michael Jack. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2012. xii, 266 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$21.95 paper.

Reviewer Jenny Barker Devine is assistant professor of history at Illinois College. She is the author of *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945* (2013).

In *The Midwest Farmer's Daughter*, author Zachary Michael Jack juxtaposes popular images of American farm women with the lived experiences of female farmers, agribusinesswomen, activists, and five generations of women on the Jack family farm in Cedar County, Iowa. Focusing primarily on the latter half of the twentieth century, Jack traces the decline of the iconic farm woman, who once symbolized strength, ingenuity, and thrift before modern agriculture took the "family" out of "family farm" and replaced it with mathematics, economics, and bottom lines. Without access to the business and politics of farming, a farm woman who came of age in the 1960s found herself in a "gendered limbo, caught in a generational divide, increasingly separate from her mother and her mother's plight, but not yet having access to her father's world" (169).

As policy makers ignored women's roles in agricultural production, so too did creators of popular culture lose interest in sentimental portrayals of country living. During the early 1970s, TV executives executed a "rural purge" of western dramas, variety shows like *Lawrence Welk*, and sitcoms like *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Mayberry R.F.D.*, and *Green Acres*. Following the cancellation of *Little House on the Prairie* in 1982, "poor Daisy Duke had become the last country girl standing on popular TV," and women seemed to all but disappear from discussions about rural life (5). Books that emerged from the farm crisis of the 1980s, including James Waller's *Bridges of Madison County* and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, dominated the *New York Times* bestseller list, but provided dark, oppressive images of farm women who were perhaps "more prone to sociopathic reactionism and loveless victimization than their urban counterparts" (146).

In a meandering narrative that combines self-reflection with literary criticism and journalistic reporting, readers follow Jack as he crisscrosses the Midwest to interview farm women and their families (including his own), as well as women who left the farm long ago but continue to work in associated industries. He confers with extension agents struggling to maintain high 4-H ideals amid declining numbers and dwindling resources. He sits in on a Farm Bureau conference for young farmers where women, who constitute half of the participants, eagerly discuss the big business of the modern farm. In another chap-

ter, women who left the farms of their youth but rediscovered their love of the land explain the benefits of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) to consumers and producers. They demonstrate how women who lack the capital to invest in large, commercial operations can be successful by tapping into local markets. Jack finds that female mentorship is the cornerstone of the CSA movement and is actually vital to women in agriculture more generally, as demonstrated through discussions about the Women, Land, and Legacy project, sponsored by the Iowa-based Women, Food, and Agriculture Network.

In the final chapters, Jack considers rural-to-urban migration as he discovers hidden "farmerettes" addressing poverty and nutrition through organizations devoted to urban gardening. What is most striking about Jack's observations of contemporary farm women is that some of the most outspoken "ag-vocates" were actually products of the farm crisis whose families lost their farms during the 1980s. They reflect on the resulting hardship and family discord and on their commitment to correcting many of the problems related to modern, industrial agriculture.

The Midwest Farmer's Daughter offers an engaging, optimistic, and much-needed glimpse into the evolution of women in agriculture and popular discourse over the past century. Jack's family stories enhance the narrative by clearly illustrating the changing options and attitudes among mothers, daughters, and subsequent generations. Historians might be disappointed by Jack's cursory engagement with the wealth of secondary literature on the work lives of midwestern farm women. They might also miss a deeper exploration of popular depictions of farm women before 1960. On the other hand, scholars are just beginning to grapple with the experiences and fallout of the farm crisis. Jack lends welcome insight into how this period has shaped contemporary female farmers. Because women now own half of Iowa's farmland, this study will help break new ground in our understanding of women's contributions to agriculture.

A Midwestern Mosaic: Immigration and Political Socialization in Rural America, by J. Celeste Lay. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012. x, 224 pp. Tables, graphs, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Mariana Medina is assistant professor of political science at Iowa State University. Her research and writing have focused on immigration policy.

In *A Midwestern Mosaic*, J. Celeste Lay addresses a very important question: What is the impact of ethnic diversity in rural areas? Other