

Wilson was also involved in the use of American expertise to collectivize Soviet agriculture in the early 1930s—the most fascinating section of the book. The Soviets invited “experts” such as Wilson to advise them on the transformation of the Russian Steppes to collective wheat farms. Not only did the Soviets purchase thousands of American tractors and other types of machinery, but they also employed Americans to instruct Russian operators in their use. By all accounts, this phase of trying to industrialize Soviet agriculture was fraught with blunders. Interestingly, the political issues raised by collectivization made little impression on the American “experts”—mostly engineers—although Wilson apparently enjoyed his time in Russia and forged good relations with Russian colleagues.

Soviet collectives failed to bolster the reputation of industrialized agriculture. A similar negative aura surrounded the American experience in the twenties. Obviously, the timing could not have been worse—sandwiched between the farm crisis of the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Farmers and their political allies pointed to the costs and consequences of industrialization—unfair competition, the exodus of farmers, the decline of small towns and the infrastructure of the countryside—and acted. In 1931, Kansas—a wheat state where industrialized agriculture was already established—instituted anti-farm corporation legislation. Indeed, the family farm lobby, which used industrialized agriculture as a whipping boy, remained in the saddle for most of the century and successfully put in place similar legislation as late as the 1980s.

As Fitzgerald shows, however, in this important addition to the literature, the large industrial farm could make a contribution. Generally, where the industrial template suited conditions, an entity such as Campbell Farms, which grew wheat over large acreages in Montana, performed efficiently.

Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century, by R. Douglas Hurt. The American Ways Series. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002. xiii, 192 pp. Index, bibliographical references. \$13.95 paper.

Reviewer Karen A. J. Miller is associate professor of history at Oakland University. A portion of her current research is devoted to political responses to the agricultural depression of the 1920s.

R. Douglas Hurt, former editor of the journal *Agricultural History*, has constructed a succinct but thorough overview of American agriculture in the twentieth century. His analysis is predicated on the idea that “American agriculture in the twentieth century is the story of farmers’

dependency on the federal government" (ix). As such, he provides important historical perspective on recent policy debates concerning the relationship between the federal government and the American farmer.

Although Hurt demonstrates that the impact of market forces was affected by government policy from the beginning of the century, he identifies the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (AAA) as the foundation of farmers' dependency on the federal government. By creating permanent allotment and payment programs, the AAA shifted control over agricultural demand and productivity to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). For the rest of the century, agricultural production would be built on the USDA's commitment to protect farm income by limiting production and defining minimum prices for key commodities. In this respect, Hurt's analysis reflects the dominant current of contemporary agricultural history.

This focus on the government's efforts to moderate the impact of market forces on American farmers allows Hurt to include an examination of the larger cultural forces that have shaped agricultural policy. He acknowledges the influence of nineteenth-century ideas concerning the moral superiority of family farms and notes the recurring rhetoric of pastoral life that permeated agricultural policy debates. More importantly, he points to the inherent conflicts between these idealizations of farm life and the promotion of a farm policy dedicated to the modernization of the American economy.

Twentieth-century agricultural policy—as advocated by farm organizations and the politicians they have helped to elect—has been designed to integrate American farmers into a modernizing economy. Rural communities were to be protected, but it was assumed that farmers should embrace new technology and value economic efficiency. Adapting farms to emerging science would bring about greater efficiencies, hence greater income. By guaranteeing the profitability of agriculture, it was hoped that rural youth would not abandon family farms. Hurt points to the steady promotion of new technology in agriculture. From the creation of demonstration farms in the Progressive Era to contemporary advocacy of genetic research, the federal government has pushed farmers to use the most recent advances in science. By interweaving the evolution of technology promotion with the evolution of price support policy, Hurt demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between the federal government and American farmers.

Hurt does not overlook the fundamental irony of twentieth-century agricultural policy. Despite the best efforts of policy makers, federal intervention has not preserved the family farm. As he dis-

cusses each stage of government intervention, Hurt provides statistics that demonstrate the flaws in federal policy. The numbers provide their own drama: in 1900, 42 percent of the American population lived on farms; in the mid-1990s, less than 2 percent of Americans did. As farms became larger and more efficient, fewer young people felt compelled to stay in agriculture. Since mid-century, the average age of farmers has steadily increased.

Federal efforts to promote modernization and economic efficiency through a variety of means—including adopting new technologies, improving access to credit, and promoting global markets—have proved to be a double-edged sword. Improved efficiencies have best served the largest farms. Economies of scale have forced smaller operations to rely on outside income, including both government subsidies and off-farm employment. At the end of the twentieth century, marginal operations increasingly relied on rental agreements with agribusiness to solve problems of income and risk management.

The virtues of *Problems of Plenty* rest in Hurt's ability to synthesize the recent literature in agricultural history in one, slim volume. It provides a solid introduction to the basic problems of farm policy in the twentieth century. Those familiar with the contemporary farm situation will gain a deeper understanding of how the problems at the beginning of the twenty-first century came into being. However, this emphasis on providing a brief history of American farming contains liabilities. Export and tariff policies receive only passing consideration. Postwar policies regarding suburbanization and the promotion of cheap, mass-market food are addressed only tangentially. However, Hurt has provided a comprehensive annotated bibliography to assist those readers who wish to develop a broader understanding of modern agricultural policy.

Patchwork: Iowa Quilts and Quilters, by Jacqueline Andre Schmeal. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003. xv, 140 pp. Illustrations, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Barbara J. Dilly is assistant professor of anthropology at Creighton University. Her research and writing have focused on rural Iowa communities.

Jacqueline Schmeal's photographic and ethnographic patchwork of the lives of 17 quilters and 70 quilts reveals the importance of quilts and quilters to the social, cultural, economic, and artistic history of Iowa. As historic texts, quilts illustrate the stories of rural women's social lives, their misfortune and joy, their production techniques and technology, and their creative energy. The cultural values of rural Iowa

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