

Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains: Years of Readjustment, 1920–1990, by Mary W. M. Hargreaves. Development of Western Resources Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. xiii, 386 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$45.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GORDON HENDRICKSON, STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Agricultural development on the Great Plains has been marked by individual initiative and federal intervention. The desire to turn the "great American desert," the land of little rain, into a flowering garden succeeded most dramatically with the development of Hardy Webster Campbell's "scientific farming system"—dry farming—at the turn of the twentieth century. Even with the knowledge of how to farm with little rain, agricultural development in the western Dakotas and eastern Montana has been subject to the fluctuations of weather and the vagaries of government policy.

Mary Hargreaves examines the success of dry farming and the impact of government policy on the dry farming regions of the Dakotas and Montana in the period from the 1920s to 1990. The development of better dry-farming techniques to increase production, and governmental efforts to manage market instability through production controls, she concludes, were not complementary. The former were successful, the latter not necessarily so. In fact, the latter have adversely affected dry farming by constricting the productive acreage in dry-farming areas of the Great Plains. The fortune of the region, therefore, often is in the hands of government policymakers rather than in the hands of farmers.

Dry farmers diversified their crops, planted new seed varieties, bought tractors, combines, and trucks, and consolidated landholdings during and after the 1920s to maximize the return on their labor. As the federal government designed relief efforts in the 1930s, it addressed concerns for erosion control by limiting the opening of new land, it sought to relocate farmers from seemingly nonproductive land, and it worked to raise prices by limiting production. Prime targets for relocation and retirement of land from production were the dry-farming areas of the Great Plains. Farmers responded with additional adjustments in their farming techniques to increase production through the use of fertilizers, insecticides, and additional equipment and the continued consolidation of land into larger farming units.

Throughout the period since the 1920s, the federal government has worked to control markets and limit production by removing land from production. Much of the land the Resettlement Administration (in the 1930s), the Soil Bank Program (in the 1950s) and the Conserva-

tion Reserve Program (in the 1980s) targeted for removal from production is in the dry-farming regions. Government policy often has supported less efficient agricultural methods at the expense of dry farming. As the federal government relocated farmers from dry-farming areas to help control production and limit soil erosion, it also promoted costly irrigation projects. The large investment required to develop irrigated agriculture actually results in a relatively small increase in land in production. Despite concerns that dry farming is not as cost-effective and productive as other methods, Hargreaves documents the production levels of dry-farming areas. Dry farming is viable and cost-effective as a result of farmer initiative when responding to changing demands of the weather and the desire to increase production while using fewer acres. Hargreaves contends that a government policy that targets dry-farming areas for production limitation is misplaced and counterproductive.

This volume is a well-researched and thoroughly documented study of agricultural development in the western Dakotas and eastern Montana. Hargreaves used U.S. Department of Agriculture statistical reports, in-house studies, and state agricultural reports along with manuscript collections, newspapers, and numerous secondary sources for her study. The result is a book of immense value. The conclusion that dry farming should be encouraged as a method to feed the world might be contested; the conclusion that dry farming has been a productive method cannot be denied.

Letters from the Front, 1898–1945, edited by Michael E. Stevens. Voices of the Wisconsin Past Series. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1992. xii, 175 pp. Illustrations, suggested readings, index. \$7.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY KEVIN B. BYRNE, GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

Michael Stevens writes in the introduction to *Letters from the Front* that "war, with all its problems and contradictions, cannot and should not be forgotten" (v). Thanks to collections such as this one, it will not be. General readers and specialists alike interested in knowing more about wartime experiences of twentieth-century Americans will profit from an examination of these letters.

This slim volume succeeds admirably in providing us with the perspectives of dozens of Wisconsinites caught up in the Spanish-American War and the subsequent war for Filipino independence, World War I, or World War II. The voices behind the letters are those

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