

Agriculture and Industry

On October 11, 1953, Iowans saw a map of the United States in their newspapers which depicted a bulging Hawkeye State, virtually equal in size to California and Texas. This map was proportioned not along geographic lines but rather on total farm production. Based on the 1950 census figures, California was first, Iowa came second, and Texas third — all closely grouped together.

Graphic devices to stress the importance of agriculture in Iowa were hardly necessary. Corn was and still is king. Indeed, Iowa income is closely tied to the marketability of what a Cedar Rapids newsman called "the most useful, versatile and valuable member of the vegetable kingdom ever granted to mankind by an all-wise Providence."

The 1953 corn crop was not in a class with the all-time record of 697,792,000 bushels picked in 1952. Despite a seven-bushel loss per acre because of the drought the 1953 corn crop of almost 600,000,000 bushels was of a high quality. The price of corn was off from the 1952 figure, but pork prices averaged \$21.50 per hundredweight so Iowa farmers had a cushion for their income drop.

The decline in farm prices in 1953 was estimated at \$75,000,000 below 1952 receipts. Cattle

men appeared hardest hit, but nearly all farmers felt the loss to some degree. Farm land values accordingly ebbed lower, averaging \$198 per acre, or \$14 per acre less than the 1951 record. Faced with the prospect of a smaller income, many farmers did not buy machinery and equipment which would have been purchased in better circumstances. One result of this decline in farm income, therefore, was a perceptible recession in the farm equipment industry. Unemployment was generally confined to these industries and did not become widespread.

Aware of their power at the polls, Iowa farmers candidly expressed their views on national issues in 1953. Fifty-eight per cent of those polled by *Wallace's Farmer* favored some type of social security for farmers, a considerable rise over the 1952 poll. The Iowa Farm Bureau moved away from a cautious low price support stand and voted unanimously to urge a medium, flexible government price support program for storable farm commodities.

Foreign trade came close to home in 1953. Several Iowa grocers imported New Zealand beef, selling it for twenty-nine cents a pound. This type of international trade did not appeal to Delton Davis, Fertile locker plant owner, who sold more than 30,000 pounds of Iowa beef at twenty-nine cents a pound after he became "fed up reading about 29-cent New Zealand beef." Beef prices

were off in 1953, however, and some farmers switched from cattle to other livestock.

Iowa farmers did well at livestock shows. Karl Hoffman and his son, Jack, of Ida Grove, won grand and reserve grand championship ribbons at the International Livestock Exposition in Chicago with their carlot of fat Hereford and Aberdeen-Angus cattle. It was Karl Hoffman's seventh grand championship at the Chicago show. Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Mitchell of Reinbeck exhibited Cloverton Craggs 4th, which was judged the grand champion of female milking Shorthorns at the International Dairy Show in Chicago. A week earlier the cow had won the same prize at the Waterloo Dairy Cattle Congress. Miss Polly Superior, grand champion Shetland mare at the Iowa State Fair, was sold by Leslie Oliver of Williamsburg at auction for \$1,275. Jimmy Maxted, high school senior from Ottumwa, won eleven awards in hog judging at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, including junior champion and reserve junior champion for his Berkshire hogs.

Shirley Johnson of Elk Horn, Willa V. Northy of Milford, Clifford G. Fett of Argyle, and Robert L. Walker of Kellerton visited the nation's capital as Iowa's leading 4-H club members. There they saw President Eisenhower and heard their work lauded by Vice-President Richard Nixon. The Future Farmers of America observed their twenty-fifth anniversary in scores of Iowa communities.

Statisticians reported an estimated 42,502,000 chickens in Iowa, a 2 per cent increase over 1952. Improved feed-price ratios and higher egg prices apparently encouraged farmers to raise more chickens.

There were signs the Iowa industrial boom of 1950 through 1952 was at an end. Retail sales were leveling off, declining several hundred million dollars from the 1952 peak. Department store sales were recorded at about the 1951-52 pace. New car sales spurted tremendously, boosted by sales campaigns late in the year when 1954 models were shown. Life insurance sales were far ahead of the 1952 figures. Construction was proceeding at the same rate as in 1951, which was satisfactory to most contractors. But industrial employment was on the downgrade in the last three months of 1953, and it was easier to find a job in retail stores or offices than in factories.

Manufacturing plants were turning out more goods than ever before in 1953. The Iowa Development Commission estimated the value of their products at \$3,700,000,000, double the 1948 figure. Food processing (including meat packing), farm machinery, and printing and publishing were the leading industries.

Labor relations in Iowa industry were better in 1953 than in most other postwar years. The labor situation was doubtless disturbing to farm equipment plants when layoffs began during the fall,

ending a long period of expansion and full employment. But elsewhere there were increasing signs of greater employment and better working conditions.

Good fortune smiled on many workers. At Cedar Rapids, the Collins Radio Company announced that it paid 191 employees \$2,985 in bonuses for their suggestions on production improvement. The W. A. Sheaffer Pen Company at Fort Madison announced profit-sharing payments to workers that brought the firm's 19-year-old policy of sharing earnings to a total of \$11,700,000. Seventy employees of the Monroe Company of Colfax received letters on Friday, March 13, which had a \$100 check attached. The letter urged workers "to take this 100 bucks and spend it for something you would not ordinarily feel you could afford." The Pella Rolscreen Company distributed profit-sharing checks totaling almost \$175,000 to over 500 employees, making 1953 the seventh year such bonuses have been awarded. The total manufacturing payroll in Iowa for 1953 was \$586,475,000, paid to an average of 167,850 factory employees.

Research for industry was making strides. The Collins Radio Research Laboratory was partially completed in November, adding needed space for projects in the expanding electronics field. During 1953 the Cedar Rapids firm had 38 inventions patented, demonstrating the value of research.

Significant changes in industrial personnel and ownership also occurred in 1953. W. W. McCallum was elected president of John Morrell & Company of Ottumwa to succeed Geo. M. Foster. At Fairfield the Dexter Company, "builders of better washing machines for more than half a century," was sold to the Philco Corporation, but the plant was scheduled to remain in Fairfield.

A fine corn crop and relatively steady employment caused internal revenue officials to forecast Iowans would probably pay more Federal taxes than at any time in history. The bedrock of the Iowa economy — agriculture — was buttressed by years of high prices and thousands of sizeable savings accounts. A broader base for our economy was being achieved through a continued expansion of diversified industries in Iowa. The total value of Iowa property was estimated at well over \$14,000,000,000. Wealthy, expanding Iowa had added richly to her storehouse of goods in 1953.

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