

Agricultural Relief in 1873

Conditions were discouraging for the farmers of Iowa in 1873. In hope of alleviating the hard times, the agricultural advantages of Iowa were advertised and various suggestions were made for the utilization of farm products and the expansion of markets. The report of Lorenzo S. Coffin, an agent of the Iowa State Board of Immigration, was particularly significant. His letter to the Secretary of the Board, as here published, retains the eccentricities of form and diction in the original manuscript which was copied by Professor Earle D. Ross in 1928 in the Archives Division of the Historical Department of Iowa at Des Moines. — The Editor.

I, as agent of your Hon. Board commissioned by Gov. Carpenter to visit the Eastern States to induce immigration to our State, beg leave, to submit through you to the Board the following report — I rec'd. my commission & entered upon my work about the middle of the past summer. My ultimate field of labor was N.E., but being painfully conscious that as a state we were seriously lacking in the development of those cheaper & ruder manufactories, by which our farmers could realize a better return for their at present almost unrequiting toil, I stopped in Ill. & other intermediate states

to examine & learn what I could of the construction, mode of operating & profitableness of certain butter cheese & canning & pickleing factories — & if I found it feasible, to lay such information as I might gather before our farmers for their benefit. On visiting such factories I found nothing but what we could undertake with much profit and advantage. I accordingly in a few very imperfectly written letters to certain papers of the state, gave the results of my investigations.

Although this was not the exact legitimate & direct design of my commission, yet I felt it to be so important to us as an agricultural state I took the responsibility to so do, & I am now more than satisfied that the end justified the means. For I found quite a large class of men & women around these establishments who are skilled in these departments of industries, who are looking to the west as their future homes, — & would like & are ready to come into our state & enter at once upon the work of such factories.

And if it would not be deemed impertinent, your agent would suggest that your Hon. Board most *earnestly* recommend to the coming Legislature that steps be taken, in whatever way their wisdom may direct, to encourage the building of such factories & the immigration of such skilled labor as will secure their successful operation.

Again your agent would further report, that on a more extended visit eastward he found a great number of families, living on rented farms, there who are *good* farmers & most have some little means ahead, & are desirous of coming west — but fearing the hardships & privations of a frontier life & having not enough means to buy an improved farm with the necessary stock & tools, think there is no way to accomplish what they desire —

Now I find by conversing with the many farmers I met at the State Grange recently held in your capitol that there is a great scarcity in the state of good farm labor & also that hundreds of well-to-do farmers want just such families as tenant, or as overseers to take charge — If their wants could be supplied the benefits arising are too obvious, for me to take time to mention — That this want can be met by putting these parties in the east, into communication with the parties here wanting such labor is to me evident. Such families I am confident would gladly start for a home on our better soil if they knew that a home & work were in waiting for them — I know of no better way to secure this good & industrious class of citizens for our state than to have an agent appointed by the state, as a medium between these two parties — Such an one, *known* as the state agent for immigration,

could be informed by those here wanting help & he could direct just *where & how* to come — Of course there are objections to this plan & difficulties would arise, yet in the hands of an earnest and faithful man such agency would result in much good to our state. We must — *there is no escaping the fact* — we *must* have more & better labor — The saving, close economical habits of the N.E. farmer is needed among us — We take *in* by the *large quantity* but the hundred & one *little wastes & losses* by lack of care — is what “beats us” every time —

There is still another field in which a state agent can work to almost infinite advantage to us as a people — & that is to induce men to come into our state & engage in manufactories other than those mentioned above — This I am convinced from my short experience can be done.

Bear in mind, I have been limited in my work. What I have done has all been at my own expense. Not a dollar have I received either as salary or for expenses, neither do I expect to receive any. Of course I could not do what I might have accomplished had I had means to defray the expenses of the work. Still from what little I have seen & done I am well convinced that a live man as agent can do much in this direction. The manufacture of wagons & carriages of all kinds, as well as our

farm machinery should be here at home. — It does seem to me that a judicious showing of the advantages & prospects for such industries would induce parties, in the over-crowded centers of such works east, that are already looking for other openings, to seek such openings with us — In this direction I should deem it of the utmost importance to have an agent employed.

Right here, if you will bear with a digression, I would, with all due deference, suggest as an inducement to parties looking for openings for establishing manufactures — that the Legislature pass an act exempting from taxation for a term of years all property brought into the state & employed in such manufactures, and further if the state will not pass such a law as a *state* law, that a law may be passed to allow Counties to do so as far as county taxes are concerned.

I cannot close this report without again calling your attention to the importance of the dairy interests of the state — and of the enormous wealth we are letting slip through our fingers, just because this interest is *simply neglected*.

I will place before you some figures based far below a proper estimate so that they will bear scrutiny: (Perhaps I might say here, that I have been, for over three years now, making cheese & hence I have reasons for saying my figures are

below an average —) Now for the figures — Suppose we had a cheese factory in each of the 100 counties of the state — & each factory only made up the milk from 300 cows & that each cow only made $1\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. of cheese per day — & the factory run only 150 days in the year — We will sell our cheese say at $12\frac{1}{2}$ cts per lb — now, what have we in the sum total? — \$562,500 (over a half million of dollars) would flow *into* instead of *out* of the state — The estimate as said before is much too low in the amount of cheese per cow & the number of days the factory runs — I have said nothing of the butter & other products — neither have I of the other industries that would spring up with this such as the making of dairy fixtures & cheese boxes. Instead of only one factory in a county there should in some, be a doz. & in others, butter factories.

Aside from all this there is another view of this matter to a *true* farmer that is of far more importance. It is this — However rich our soil, this constant grain cropping & carrying away is sure to tell upon it by & by.

An inexpressible sadness fills the heart of a genuine agriculturist as he sees this suicidal work going on year after year & he knows too well of the coming sterility unless this vandalism of the soil is checked —

That man that lifts his voice & his life long action if need be against this system & brings about a plan for consuming on the farm the crop raised thereon will have done a good to his state that is past all estimate. I would then most earnestly urge upon your Hon. Board to take such steps as in your wisdom may seem best, to induce the Legislature to use every available means to so encourage such a system of farming as will enable us to keep up the amazing fertility of our soil & at the same time will remunerate the tillers of the same. To this end, I am confident that a judicious encouragement given to the building of cheese & butter factories, by hold[ing] out liberal inducements for the immigration of such persons skilled in such industries will meet the hearty approbation of the mass of the farmers of the state, as well as approval of every other citizen, who wishes its prosperity.

At the risk of being thought tedious, I venture to call the attention of the "Board" to another matter that seems to me of some moment — The misfortune that has befallen a few (comparatively) of our citizens in some of the North Western counties will give to the state a bad odor abroad & be likely to turn immigration away from our & into other states. And the agents of other states, always jealous of our superior soil & climate, will

seize upon this & magnify it to our injury — To those at a distance, there is but little discrimination & when some of their local papers speak of the "famine in Iowa" they, thinking our state to be their own little 7 by 9 affair, suppose our whole state is on the verge of starvation. This (simple as it may seem to us,) will unless counteracted work largely to our disadvantage for a year or two. The people east should be made to see that this matter is *merely local & temporary* & that in a few months these same localities will be teeming with abundance.

All of which is respectfully submitted —

L. S. COFFIN