

The Farm Bureau

The first Farm Bureau was organized in Broom County, New York, in 1911, through the efforts of the Binghamton Chamber of Commerce. John Barron, a graduate of the New York Agricultural College, was appointed County Agent to serve the Bureau in an advisory capacity. The purpose of this agency was educational. It was designed to demonstrate the value of scientific farming and to improve the economic, educational, and social position of the people engaged in farming. The idea seemed feasible and it spread rapidly. The United States Department of Agriculture lent its support to the movement and during World War I it urged the farmers to organize County Farm Bureaus as agencies to implement the Emergency Food Production Act of 1917.

It may be observed that the Farm Bureau movement is closely associated with the development of the County Agent system, which originated in the South at the turn of the century under the leadership of Seaman A. Knapp, pioneer farmer of Benton County and formerly president of the Iowa Agricultural College. Knapp had been appointed an agent of the Bureau of Plant Industry to introduce improved farming practices into Texas by

means of the "demonstration farm." The system thus inaugurated brought to the farmers the results of agricultural research carried on by the agricultural colleges, the agricultural experiment stations, and the United States Department of Agriculture. It finally assumed its present form by the passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which provided for grants-in-aid to the state agricultural extension services on a fifty-fifty basis under the supervision of the land-grant colleges. Arrangements were made with the county authorities for the employment of County Agents.

In order to reach the farmers more effectively with scientific and practical information, voluntary associations were formed, composed chiefly of farmers who were interested in improving their farming practices and who welcomed the help of scientifically trained men. This form of association came to be called the Farm Bureau, which was originally designed merely as an agency to facilitate the work of the County Agent. There was no thought at the time of laying the foundations of a great national farm organization.

The Farm Bureaus performed a valuable service in carrying out the provisions of the Emergency Food Production Act of 1917, which outlined and developed a definite plan for increased food production. They then began to assume newer functions which gave them a wider sweep over agricultural interests. The question arose as

to what was to be done with the county Farm Bureaus which had served their purpose so well as Emergency Food Production agencies. It was held that they should be continued and directed toward the development of a program for the promotion of scientific and practical farming and the advancement of the farming population.

Some states began to federate their county Farm Bureaus into state organizations before the end of World War I. With this movement came the organization in 1919 of the American Federation of Farm Bureaus in Chicago. James R. Howard of Clemons, Iowa, was elected its first national president. A declaration of principles was then adopted:

To develop, strengthen, and correlate the work of the state Farm Bureau Federations of the Nation, to encourage and promote cooperation of all representative agricultural organizations in every effort to improve facilities and conditions for the economic production, conservation, marketing, transportation, and distribution of farm products; to further the study and enactment of constructive agricultural legislation; to advise with representatives of the public agricultural institutions in cooperation with farm bureaus in the determination of nation-wide policies; and to inform farm bureau members regarding all movements that affect their interests.

The American Federation of Farm Bureaus immediately achieved political significance. With the collapse of farm prices in 1920-1921 and the coming on of the Great Depression in agriculture,

it established a permanent lobby in Washington. Membership increased rapidly to a high point of 466,485 farm families in 1921 and then steadily declined to a low of 163,246 in 1933 when it was again increased year by year to 444,485 in 1940. Since then it has made remarkable gains, reaching 1,409,798 in 1949 with a goal of 1,500,000 in 1950. Representing in the main the more prosperous farmers, with an upper-class orientation, the Farm Bureau has maintained close relationship with the land-grant colleges through the agricultural extension service. It has also promoted cooperative marketing and the 4-H Club movement, and it has championed a comprehensive legislative farm program.

The first County Agent in Iowa was employed by Clinton County in 1912. During the next few years the County Agent work spread slowly. At the time of the entrance of the United States into World War I there were only twenty-two counties in Iowa that had County Agents. With the beginning of the war came the order from the United States Department of Agriculture to organize Farm Bureaus in every county. By April 1, 1918, every one of the 99 counties had a County Agent (Pottawattamie County had two) and the average membership of the individual Farm Bureau was 200. They were very active during the last year of the war and were given much credit for aid in the distribution of seed

corn in 1918 and for stabilizing seed corn and husking prices. One County Agent, D. H. Zentmire, has served Iowa County a record 32 years.

With the signing of the armistice, the Farm Bureaus experienced a decline and for a time the future was uncertain. It was obvious that the Bureaus needed reorganization if they were to survive. A few leaders were vitally interested and a meeting of delegates from the county Farm Bureaus was held at Marshalltown on December 27, 1918. Seventy-two of the county Farm Bureaus sent delegates and ten others sent votes by proxy in favor of starting a state organization. At this meeting the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation was formed, with James R. Howard as president, and John W. Coverdale of Ames as secretary. It was recognized that the field of action of the state federation should be somewhat different from that of the local and county units which had been largely engaged in the production end of the program. The plan for the state organization was not to duplicate or replace the work of the county but to emphasize certain general principles for the good of Iowa farm interests. The National Federation was designed to help shape national affairs.

The objectives of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation were to bring about effective cooperation of agricultural organizations working especially toward improving production; conservation; marketing, transportation, and distribution of farm

products; the enactment of constructive farm legislation; and advising with the various Farm Bureaus. Four committees were formed: organization, marketing and transportation, legislation and representation, and education. In 1920 two new standing committees were added to the ones established earlier: one on cost of production, the other on supply and demand. In 1922 the farm women were organized into a special group to work as a cooperating unit. The committees have changed from time to time. In 1935 there were standing committees on legislation, marketing, organization, service, transportation, rural electrification, soil conservation and production adjustment, taxation, auditing and budget, education, insurance, rural credit and banking, and constitutional amendments. The Farm Bureau has continuously widened its fields of interest from the beginning until there is very little about farm life in which it does not take an active part.

Membership in the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation has followed the general trend of the National Federation. It rose rapidly to a peak of 109,534 farm families in 1920 and then declined to a low of 18,041 in 1933, after which it mounted to 40,275 in 1940, and 90,437 in 1945. By 1949 the membership was further increased to 124,689 with a goal of 150,000 set for 1950. The Iowa Farm Bureau has steadily held second place in membership in the nation, while Illinois has maintained

first place with a membership of 170,000 reported in 1949. Benton County leads the 99 counties of Iowa. Dues for membership for the support of the organization were originally fixed at \$5.00 a year, later raised to \$10.00, and then to \$15.00 in 1949, of which fifty cents goes to the National Federation, \$4.50 to the Iowa Federation, and \$10.00 to the county Farm Bureau.

The Iowa Farm Bureau works in close cooperation with the Agricultural Extension Service of the Iowa State College to introduce improved practices in farming and homemaking and to promote rural youth and 4-H programs. This connection is made through the county extension director who is assisted by a home economist. The director is paid by three agencies: the federal government, the county government, and the county Farm Bureau. He is therefore the servant of both public and private agencies. While his function is understood to be purely educational, there has been some criticism of this double role of serving both the state and a farm organization as a political and commercial agency. This situation has been clarified by the creation of a new position, that of fieldman, whose function it is to solicit new members, organize township meetings, and promote sales of the Bureau commercial services. The educational function of the county extension director is therefore clearly separated from the political and commercial activities of the Farm Bureau. For the

promotion of educational work, the county Farm Bureaus received \$348,507 in 1948 and the federal government appropriated \$450,038, with the addition of \$668,768 from membership dues.

While the Iowa Farm Bureau has emphasized education as its primary function, it has also played a leading role in policy formation and legislation on both the state and national levels. Under the leadership of its past presidents, James R. Howard, Charles E. Hearst, and Allan Kline, the Iowa Farm Bureau has actively supported the establishment of cooperatives for the marketing of grain, livestock, and dairy and other farm products. It took part in the formation of the Farm Bloc of 1921-1924, a bipartisan bloc of southern and western senators and representatives, which forced through Congress a number of bills, including the Capper-Volstead Cooperative Act exempting cooperatives from the operation of the Sherman Anti-Trust law. It favored the enactment of the McNary-Haugen bill for the disposal of the agricultural surplus which was twice passed by Congress and twice vetoed by President Coolidge.

The Iowa Farm Bureau supported increased federal appropriations for agricultural research and extension, corn-borer control, farm-to-market roads, and the development of inland waterways. It demanded a protective tariff on farm products, but when the Smoot-Hawley bill granting this demand finally emerged with higher tariffs on manu-

factured products, the farm leaders were "thoroughly disgusted." While not in accord at first with the establishment of the Federal Farm Board in the Hoover administration, it defended the Board against the attacks of the Minneapolis Grain Exchange. As the demand for legislation for the disposal of the agricultural surplus shifted into the movement for production control in the early 1930's, the Iowa Farm Bureau took an active part in the formulation of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, the Second Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, and subsequent legislation supplementing and implementing the farm legislative program.

Decentralization of federal farm programs with the development of a high degree of local and state autonomy has been strongly recommended by the Iowa Farm Bureau as a means of bringing the government back to the people. The Farm Security Administration, the Farm Credit Administration, and the Soil Conservation Service are cases of "straight line administration" from Washington that have been vigorously denounced. The agricultural extension system is held up as a model of management and administration.

The demand for what became known as "equality" or "parity" for agriculture has been the rallying cry of the Farm Bureau almost from the beginning of the 1920's. This has become the most con-

troversial issue in the farm problem of 1950. While holding to the need of federal price supports, the Farm Bureau, under the vigorous leadership of its president, Allan Kline, favors a flexible price support formula adjusted to market conditions with a minimum of federal intervention in farming as a free competitive enterprise. This position is opposed to Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan's plan which, it is charged, would raise the mandatory price level on the most important farm products higher than 90 per cent of parity and would require more government control at a time when costs are rising and there is no depression and the farmers are out of debt.

In the field of international relations, the Iowa Farm Bureau has supported the United Nations Organization, the European Recovery Program, the North Atlantic Charter, the coordination of international agencies, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the international federation of agricultural producers, the international exchange of farm leaders, students, technicians, and leaders of agriculture, industry, labor, and the professions, the reduction of trade barriers, and the reciprocal trade agreements.

While the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation has played a leading role in national policy-making and legislation, it has also taken an active part in the promotion of education and legislation and in the development of business enterprise in the state.

In recent years it has organized a number of affiliated commercial companies under the management of the Iowa Farm Administrative Board, which is composed of a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer who are elected annually by the Board of Directors of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation. These commercial affiliates are the Iowa Farm Service Company, the Iowa Plant Food Company, the Business Service Association, the Iowa Farm Serum Company, the Building Corporation, the Iowa Mutual Hail Insurance Company, and the Iowa Life Insurance Company.

These companies have been conducting a large volume of business as shown by the annual reports of 1948. The Iowa Farm Service Company, organized in 1938, reported sales of gasoline, oil, grease, tires, and paint amounting to \$6,052,955, with a net income to the company of \$146,905. The Iowa Plant Food Company's sales amounted to \$1,318,774, with a net profit of \$103,064. The Iowa Farm Serum Company reported sales of hog cholera serum and virus, including insecticides and spray equipment, with a return of \$819,830. The Iowa Farm Mutual Insurance Company had 102,732 automobile policies in force. The Iowa Life Insurance Company had insurance in force to the amount of \$79,590,001. The dividends returned to Bureau members by all the service companies amounted to more than \$900,000. The Farm Bureau owns its headquarters in Des

Moines: an eight story building with offices rented to the various bureau-affiliated companies.

In state legislation, the Iowa Farm Bureau has taken an active and effective part by virtue of a vigorous leadership representing half of the farm families of Iowa. There are more members of the Farm Bureau in both houses of the legislature than of any other organization. The Bureau supports liberal appropriations for education at all levels, including extension and research; the development of a comprehensive state highway system, including farm-to-market roads; and the new county assessor law. It opposes the removal of the legislative restrictions on the manufacture and sale of oleomargarine, supplementing the Act of Congress of 1886, which has recently been repealed.

It has been said that "the prestige and power of the Farm Bureau in business and politics rests upon the reputation which the organization has gained through the years as an educational force." This was the original purpose of the Farm Bureau. It is centered largely in the township and county organizations. To review the Extension Service, the Women's Committees, the Rural Young People's Department, and the 4-H Boys' and Girls' Club Work, which has been no small part of the Farm Bureau program, would go beyond the limits of this article.

The educational feature enabled the National Grange to survive reverses and steadily grow

stronger with a present national membership of over 800,000. Without an educational program for the development of a sound grass-roots philosophy under an intelligent and progressive leadership, any national farm organization bids fair to be just a big lobby destined to be discredited by the people it presumes to represent.

The social feature of farm organizations on the grass-roots level should also be considered. There are many rural communities in Iowa today where the Farm Bureau is the only social organization open to everyone in the community. With the improvement of country roads and the advent of the automobile and the passing of the country church, the social life of the farm people tended to be absorbed by the towns. The social solidarity of the rural community was broken down and farmers scarcely knew their neighbors as in former days. There was a definite need for a social tie-up of farm families which the rural church had in large measure provided. The Farm Bureau, the Grange, and the Farmers' Union have supplied this need.

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A review of the fundamental objectives of farm organizations from the inception of the Grange to the present shows that while there are differences in their legislative policies and lines of cleavage within the organizations, they exhibit a marked similarity in their basic aims: an adequate income;

equality ("parity"); family-sized farms; security; and opportunities for education, culture, and an enjoyable social life. These are the underlying principles of a sound agricultural philosophy without which we cannot have a sound nation.

The individualism of pioneer days is no longer sufficient to overcome the difficulties confronting the farmer. He can no longer succeed by his own unaided efforts. In earlier days the things that made for success or failure were largely in the control of the individual farmer. If he were industrious and handled his resources efficiently he was a successful farmer. But as agriculture entered the commercial stage and became a part of modern industrial society, other factors conditioned the success of the farming enterprise, with the result that the most thrifty and efficient farmer might fail through no fault of his own. Forces were set in motion over which the farmer individually had had no control. Organizations therefore became necessary to safeguard the farmer against the aggressions of other organized groups, to secure legitimate advantages for the farming population, and to promote the general public interest.

Farm organizations have also been a great educational and social force. Even if they accomplished no other result, they would be justified on this account. Organization brings the farmers together, raises pertinent questions, arouses interest, stimulates discussion, clarifies problems, trains in-

dividuals in self-expression, breaks down the barriers of individualism, and socializes the farmer.

Organization becomes a test of class efficiency. It provides an opportunity for the farmers as a class to develop initiative, self-control, capacity for leadership, social vision, and the ability to cooperate for their own and the common good. It tends to preserve the social efficiency of the farmers as a class, which is a prime factor in the preservation of the family farm not only as a business enterprise but also as a home and a way of life.

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