

# The Emergency Years

## Remembrances of a County Agricultural Agent in the Great Depression

*by Donald E. Fish*

*Artwork by James Fish*

**A**S I LOOK BACK on more than a half-century of experiences in Iowa agriculture, I am forced to conclude that the period of the early 1930s was the most exciting and eventful. It was a period in which situations and events crowded in upon people with relentless pressure. During those years I was the county agricultural agent for Dallas County, in south-central Iowa. Dallas County was then rural, with approximately two thousand farms. Now, there are less than a thousand farms, and the eastern and southern parts are dotted by much urban sprawl from Des Moines. Like all other rural counties in the United States in the early Thirties, Dallas County was at the low point of the worst agricultural depression in history. Most of the farmers in the county, if they were still solvent, were hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

Who knows when the Great Depression started? For some it may have started in 1928

or 1929. For others, it probably did not hit hard until 1931 or 1932. For sure, 1932 was the low point. If you marked the start of upward movements, you would probably circle the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt and March 1933, when the New Deal began. Perhaps the human psyche is not designed for permanent depression and there will always come a time when optimism and hope struggle to make the present and future seem rosier. Psychology plays a key role in the ups and downs of business cycles, and in early 1933 we were ready for good things to happen. We didn't know what these good things would be, and we didn't know when they would start, but definitely a strong current of optimism began to run through life in the United States. No where was this more evident than in the midwestern corn belt and Dallas County, Iowa.

In January of 1933 I had begun work as the county agricultural agent, fresh from the Uni-





Inside the Dallas County Courthouse in Adel, the author helped coordinate the New Deal Corn-Hog Program.

versity of Minnesota with a degree in agricultural business administration. My office encompassed the northeast quarter of the ground floor of the Dallas County Courthouse in Adel. It was called the "Farm Bureau Office" because at that time the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Agricultural Extension Service of Iowa State College, and the Farm Bureau were actual partners, even though this relationship was becoming a little uneasy. The Farm Bureau, at county, state, and national levels, was basically a pressure group interested in exerting legislative influence and in improving farm conditions, with special emphasis on the family farm.

Our office was typically a beehive of activity. Most of the general farm education programs were conducted by specialists from the extension service in Ames, but it was the county

agent's job to set up and publicize these meetings. We had several ongoing projects: corn and melon demonstration plots, farm record and analysis projects, swine meetings, vaccination schools, seed exchanges, farm outlook meetings, seed and soil testing services, and demonstrations of cutting meat and using new machinery. As county agent I was also in charge of boys' 4-H, just now changing from county-wide clubs to township clubs. Girls' 4-H and women's projects were coordinated mostly by the home demonstration agent, Florence Williams, or specialists from Ames, though I helped out where needed.

Funding for our programs came from three sources: Farm Bureau dues (five dollars per member family), the extension service, and county appropriations from tax funds. Under state legislation, any county farm organization



with a minimum of two hundred paid-up members was eligible to receive appropriations from their county supervisors (based on the size of the county and the number of members over two hundred).

This arrangement between Extension Service, Farm Bureau, and the USDA had been legislated in 1918, and in 1933 all but one or two Iowa counties operated under this "hybrid" program. The legitimacy of the arrangement was now being questioned by leadership in other farm organizations and had been severely criticized by Henry A. Wallace, editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* and about to become secretary of agriculture. While perhaps there were times when county agents were not sure for whom they were working, they knew that they were working for the good of all farm people. And in Dallas County, the plan worked well. Farm Bureau was the only active farm organization, and so practically all of the active leadership in the county came from Farm Bureau members.

**I**T WAS ON THIS SCENE that the national Corn-Hog Program was announced late in 1933 by Secretary of Agriculture Wallace. This was one of several emergency farm programs set up through the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). An emergency wheat adjustment program had been put in operation earlier that year, but Iowa was not a major wheat state. In Dallas County only about a hundred farms were involved, most of them in a very small way.

Yet the wheat program had given Evalyn Mark (the office secretary) and me an idea of what to expect. I could see that if any program involved a very large number of farmers, the work would require a good deal of office help that we didn't have.

After attending a state-wide meeting in Des Moines, we launched the Corn-Hog Program in late December. I scheduled seventeen information meetings, at least one in every township. Dallas County, like most of Iowa at that time, was corn and hog country, and so interest in the program ran high.

I had been given a set of large charts, and in

the first part of each meeting I tried to explain the economic conditions that had gotten American agriculture into such bad shape. The solution, government economists reasoned, was that if you would cut production, you could raise the price of farm products. This seemed logical, and our charts were simple enough that most farmers understood what we were talking about. Then I explained the mechanics of the Corn-Hog Program itself.

I didn't know what to expect from these meetings. Dallas County was a Republican county, and this was a Democratic program. In addition, there were a few very radical farmers in the county, and fireworks were rumored. But the meetings went off without a hitch. I have never seen such interest. The turnout was overwhelming. There were over two thousand people attending these meetings, about 99 percent of all the farmers in the county. I am sure that nearly every farmer in the county attended one meeting, and some attended more than one. Probably at least half of the farm women attended also. I answered questions as well as I could, noting that most were not related to the charts I had shown, but to the actual mechanics of the program, especially to the amounts of money each farmer might receive. All the details were not known, and at least every week for the next six months a new set of administrative rulings came out from Washington to clarify details.

The Corn-Hog Program paid farmers to cut production of corn and hogs. County agents would help set up contracts between the government and participating farmers. Payments to farmers would be based on the number of acres of corn taken out of production and the number of hogs *not* produced.

Each participating farmer would provide evidence of how many acres of corn had been planted on that farm for the base years 1932 and 1933. A farmer would then reduce corn acreage by 20 to 30 percent, and rent the idle land to the government. (This acreage early got the name of "government acres.") Farmers also had to present evidence verifying how many hogs they had raised and sold in 1932 and 1933. From these bases they would reduce their hog production. Compliance in fulfilling the contracts would have to be verified.





IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY/UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

A farmer from Grimes signs up for the Corn-Hog Program. In nearby Dallas County, 85 percent of the farmers participated in the program, one component of the AAA.

**O**VERSEERING EACH COUNTY was the state committee for the Corn-Hog Program, already set up in Des Moines. The committee took the advice of local Farm Bureau leaders, my predecessor, Harry Codlin, and me to set up temporary county and township committees to initially sign up interested farmers. At township meetings, farmers filled out non-binding applications for contracts and then elected permanent township committees of three to five members. The same process was carried out in all Iowa counties.

The state committee was quite politically oriented, and some complications naturally arose. This conflict could be partially traced to a feud in 1930 or 1931 between Henry A. Wallace, then editor of *Wallaces' Farmer*, and Charlie Hearst, state Farm Bureau president. Although the Farm Bureau was then the only farm organization in Iowa of any size and included a much greater number of farmers than

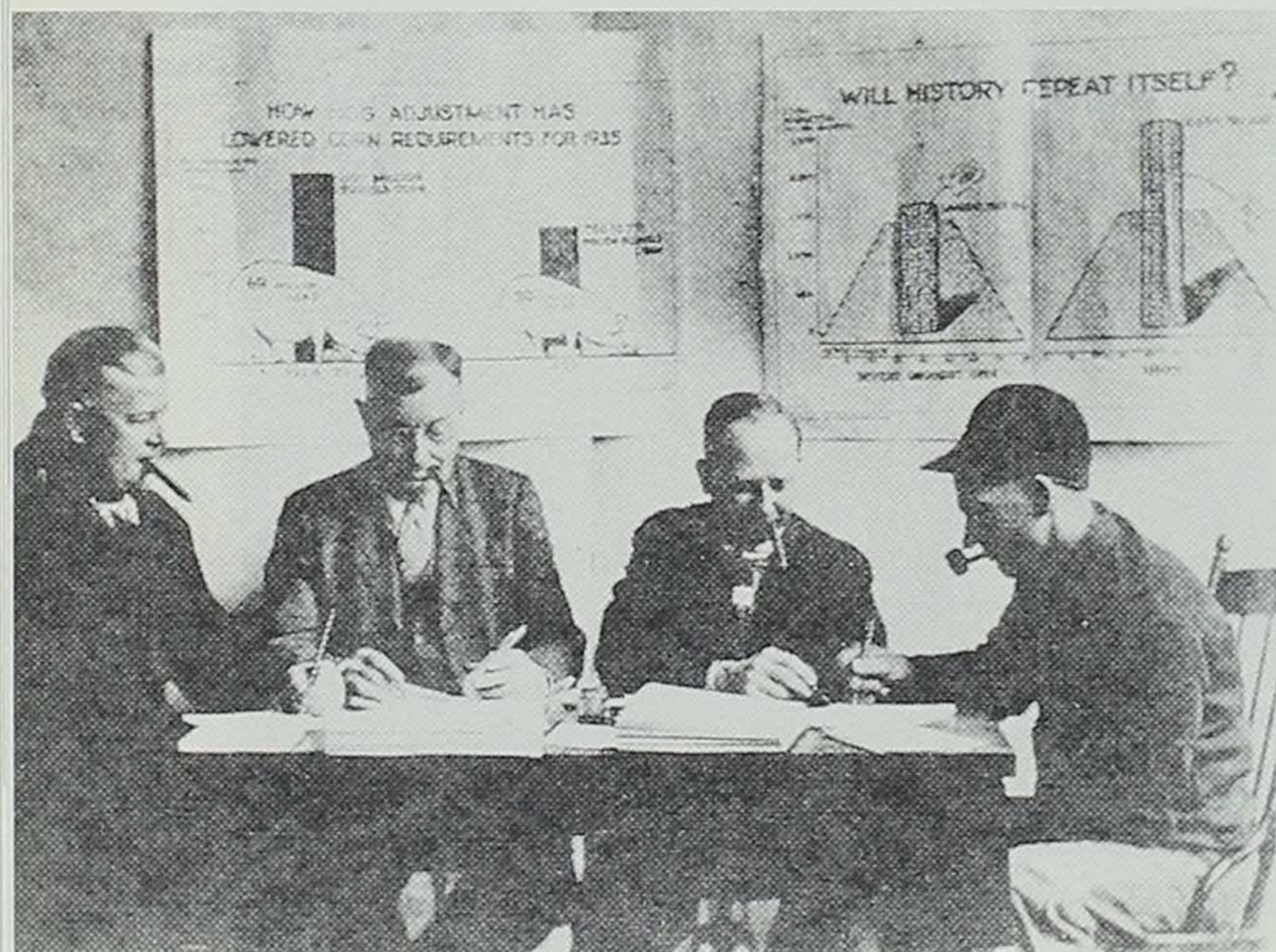
any other organization, the Farm Bureau was completely omitted from the state Corn-Hog Program committee. State chairman R. M. Evans of Laurens represented the United Farmers, a small organization that had developed during the depression. Ralph Smith of Newton represented the Iowa Grange, also very small, and Bill McArthur of Mason City was considered anti-Farm Bureau. For the next few years the strong Farm Bureau counties always had some conflicts with the state committee.

The state committee had field men who each worked about ten counties. The field man in our region, Jay Whitson of Indianola, was in Dallas County several times but seldom in the office. Apparently, he was doing quite a little underground work to see that Farm Bureau members were largely omitted from township and county committees. Finally we had a little showdown in our office one day when the temporary county committee happened to be in



session and Whitson happened to come in. It took the committee about half an hour to persuade Whitson that probably most of the township and county committee members would be Farm Bureau members — not because they belonged to Farm Bureau but because they were the best people available. Whitson left finally, and we didn't see much of him after that.

IOWA YEAR BOOK OF AGRICULTURE FOR 1934 (IOWA STATE DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE)



A township committee in Hardin County helps farmer A. J. Marske (right) sign up for the Corn-Hog Program.

By early spring 1934, Dallas County had its elected township committees, a county allotment committee (of which I was secretary) — and about two thousand applications from farmers. It was not long before we found out what a stupendous task we had ahead of us. Ralph Mortimer, the county chairman, was an Iowa State College graduate and very able. With a full-time hired man on his farm, he could come to the office every day. With USDA funds we hired two tabulators and a stenographer, and rented a typewriter and three second-hand Monroe calculators (most of us had never seen a Monroe calculator). The large Farm Bureau office became the home of all of the work on this program.

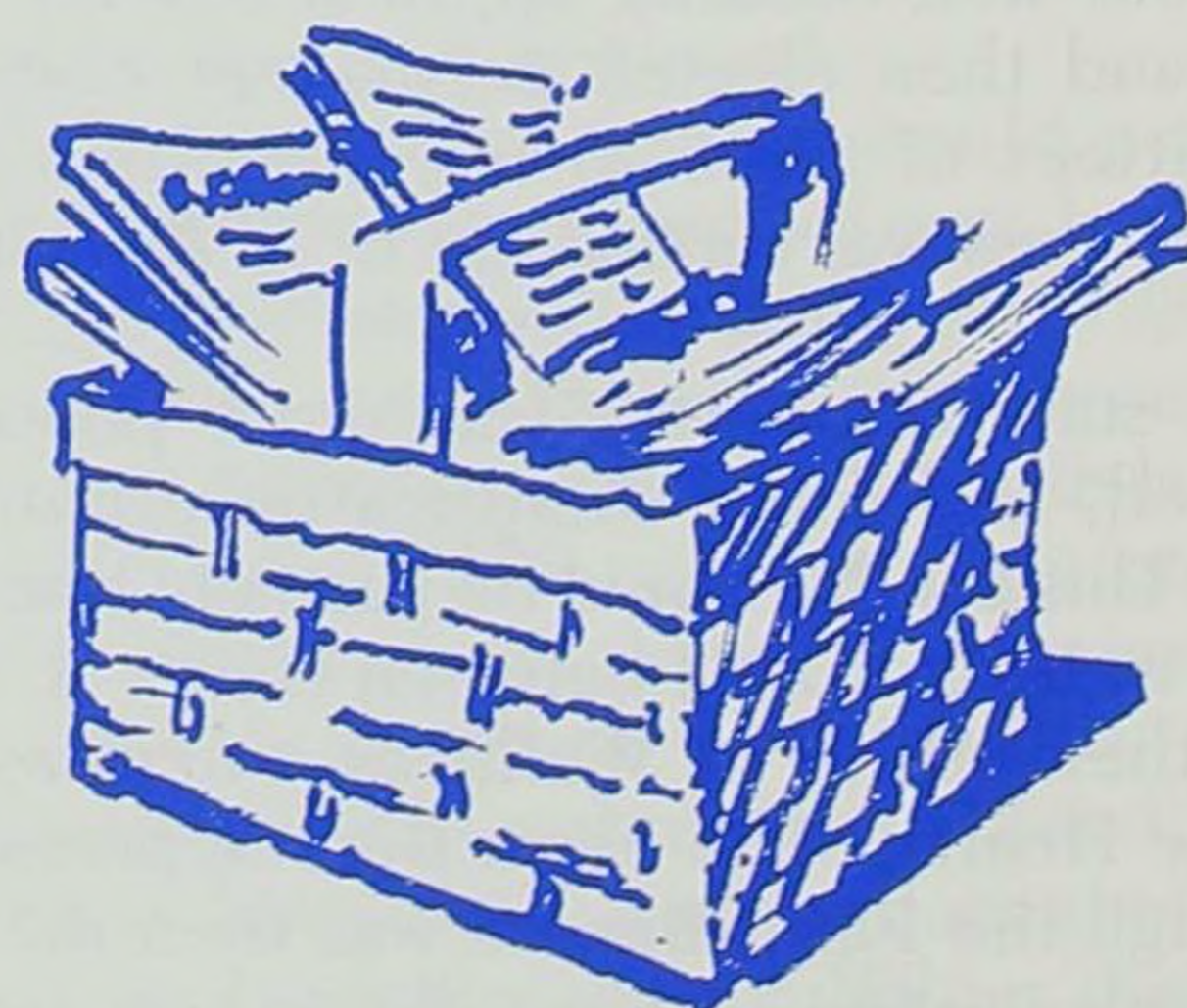
We were fortunate in our help. Marie Mann, a very competent young woman with a local farm background, was the stenographer. Tabulators A. L. Barngrover and Howard Wilcox were young men who had been raised on farms

and were temporarily out of work due to the depression. Both were good with figures, and worked well with farmers who came into the office. Jim Brown, an ex-vocational agriculture teacher, was also a tabulator, but he couldn't put in as much time because he was also farming. In retrospect, much of our success in starting the program was due to the excellent office force. Ralph Mortimer and I got along very well together. For most of that year I was responsible for keeping the office work going smoothly, and Mortimer, with the committee, made final decisions about production bases, allotments, payments, and appeals. At different stages, the township and county committeemen also worked in the office. Evalyn Mark, our Farm Bureau secretary, helped when she had time.

**O**UR PRINCIPAL TASK that spring was to verify figures from the farmers' applications, and transfer them to the contracts, which would then be signed by the farmers. Verifying was sometimes simple, sometimes not, depending on a farmer's "evidence" of corn and hog production in the base years. One morning, as I opened the office at about a quarter of eight, a farmer named Billy Morrison parked outside my office. I knew Morrison well, and he handed me a market basket full of papers.

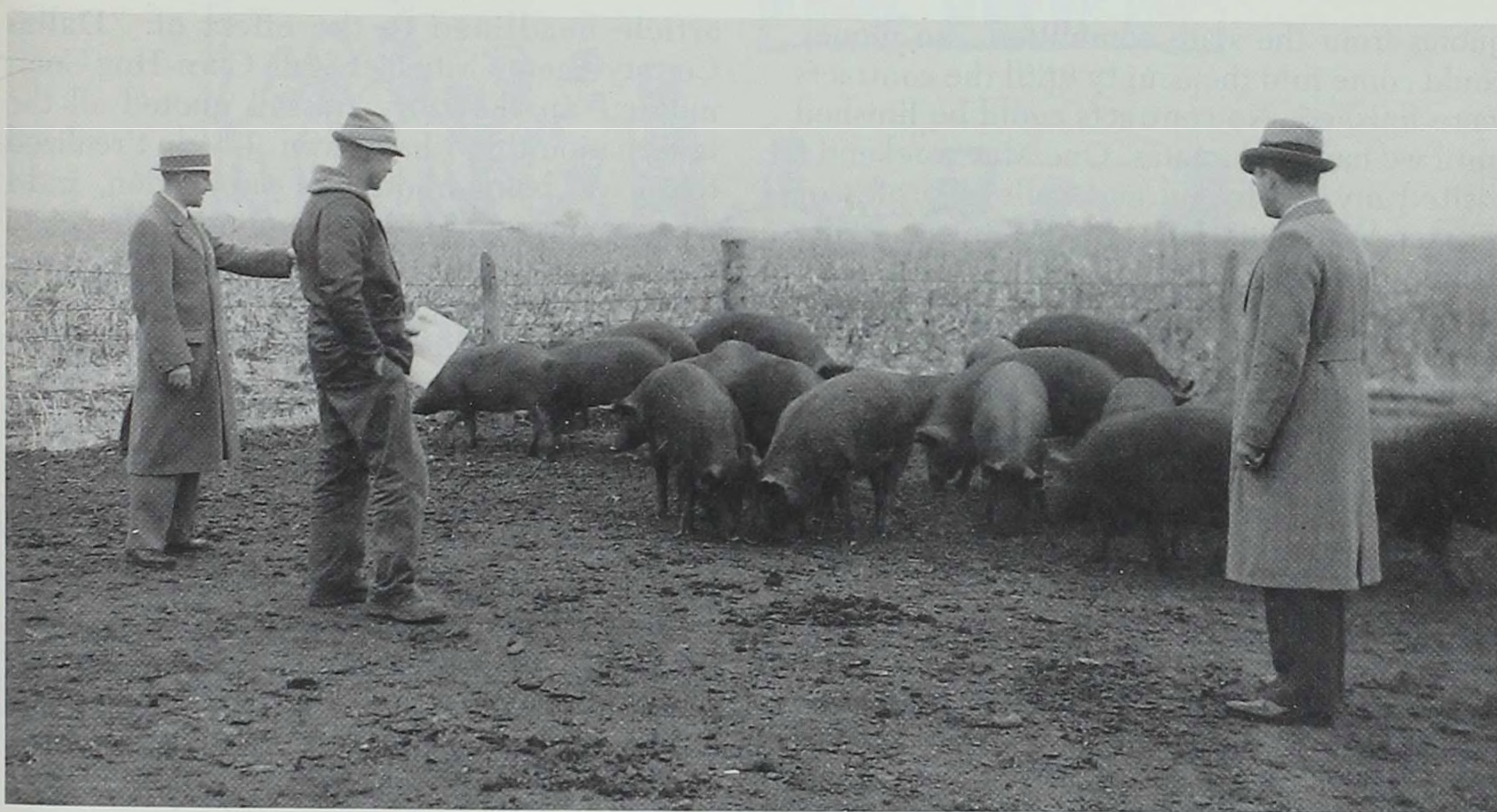
"This is my hog evidence," he said. "See what you can do with it."

Morrison was a prominent cattle feeder from Redfield, and he didn't plan to raise any hogs. But he always bought feeder pigs, including



HOG EVIDENCE





IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY/UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Farmers in the Corn-Hog Program contracted to reduce hog production. Here, a Grimes farmer and program officials.

"wet" sows, to follow the cattle. Quite often the sows that he had bought had litters — he called these "catch pigs" — and so it was quite a job to figure out how many pigs of his own raising he had sold. After about two hours, Morrison went home with an empty market basket, and we had a file full of "hog evidence."

Morrison's problem dramatized one of the thornier parts of the hog program. The farmer who raised all of his pigs from his own sows had few problems, and those who only bought and sold feeder pigs could not be in the program. The problems principally lay with those, such as Morrison, who raised some of their hogs and bought the rest. While these farmers were in the minority, their contracts were the most complicated because of the difficulty of getting satisfactory evidence of numbers of pigs bought and sold. In many cases, farmers had to go back to the packing companies and buyers to get sales slips and other information. When this evidence first began to come in, we all just shook our heads and wondered if we would ever get it worked out to anyone's satisfaction. On at least a hundred of the contracts, the hog evidence was very much in doubt and slow to be resolved. Truly, our old hand-cranked Monroe calculators were nearly cranked to death. As the program progressed, we were

finally allowed to get an electric calculator, and this was a real blessing.

For corn acreage figures, the word of the farmer was generally taken as evidence. But if the figures didn't look right, the township committee actually measured the land. We had been given a county acreage allotment and county and township yields. Because corn-reduction payments were based on production as well as acreage, sometimes county and township committees had to assign corn-yield evaluations or productivity ratings to each farm, but that would come later.

Corn payments to the farmer were based on the yield we assigned the diverted acres. One of the first jobs of the township committees was to determine the number of diverted acres and then assign productivity ratings for each farm so that the whole thing would come out within the county quota. At first this seemed like an insurmountable task, but we finally solved it by factoring the productivity ratings up or down to fit within the assigned quotas.

For the next three months, the traffic in and out of our office was stupendous. Often there were twenty or thirty people in the office at once. By early May, all the contracts were ready to send to Washington — except for one step. So far we had only received temporary



quotas from the state committee. No money could come into the county until the contracts were finished. No contracts could be finished until we had final quotas. One May weekend I visited my old friend and college professor Warren Waite in Minnesota. Waite was on the Minnesota state corn-hog committee, and I asked him why he thought our state committee was so slow. As I remember, he said that the main delay in Iowa seemed to be in deciding how big a reserve pool the state committee would need if the total contracts came in over the state quota.

"Well, I think they could work that out very easily," I said. "In Dallas County we are needing the money badly, and every delay we get is causing additional hardship."

"Well, they could get it out anytime they want to," he replied. "We have, and we see no reason for following their procedure."

It happened that when I returned home the next Monday morning, J. S. Russell, farm editor of the *Des Moines Register*, came by. Russell stopped in often on his way back and forth to Des Moines to see if he could pick up any news in our office. During the course of our conversation, I told him about the information I had picked up in Minnesota, and I must have been quite vocal about some of the goings-on by the state corn-hog committee. We visited for quite a while, and I thought very little about it until the next day.

The *Register* was always waiting for me when I came down to the office, and much to my surprise the next morning I saw a front-page

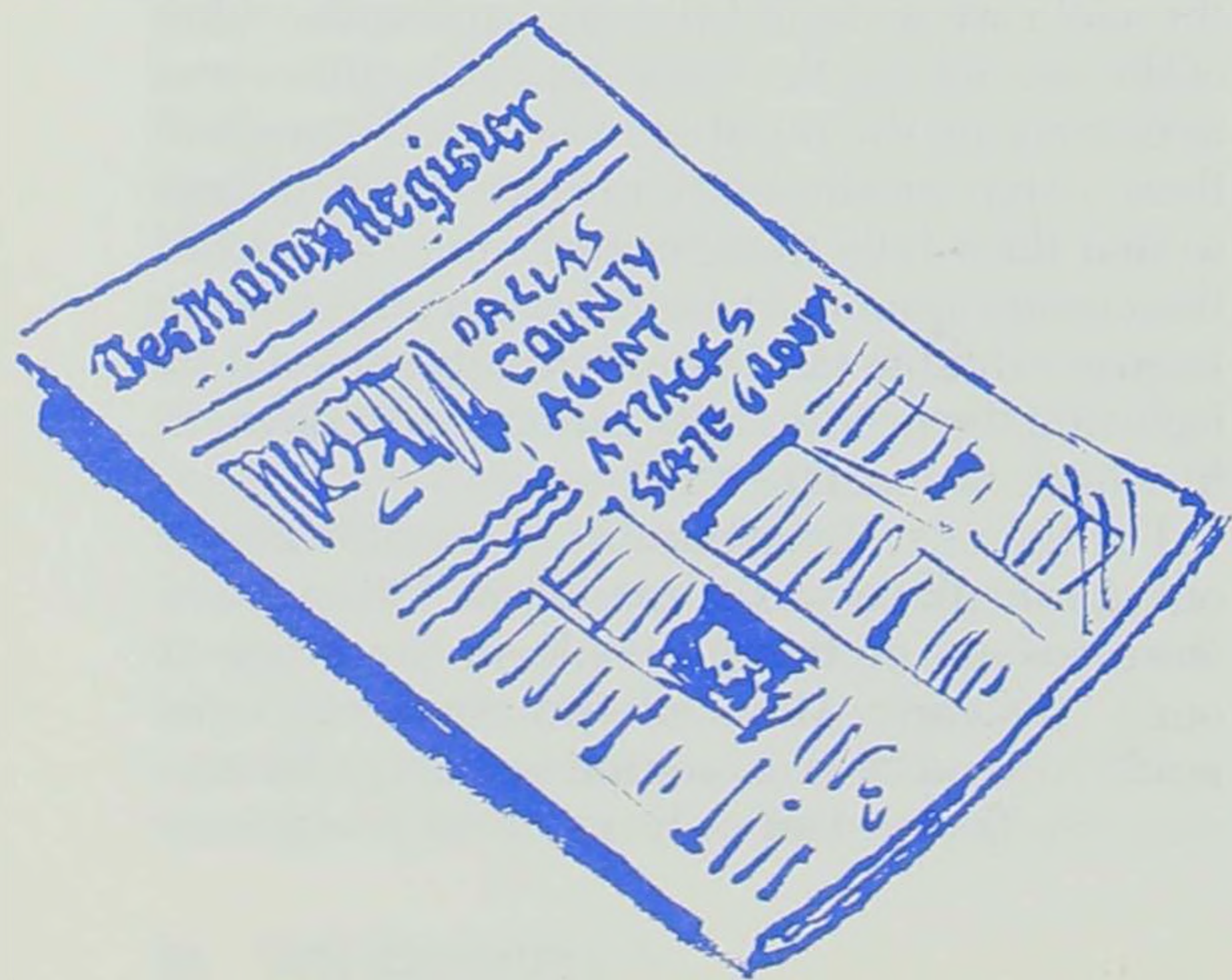
article headlined to the effect of: "Dallas County Agent Criticizes State Corn-Hog Committee." In the story Russell quoted all the information that I had given. I hadn't realized that I was being quoted for publication, and I was very upset. I didn't have much chance to catch my breath because my phone rang immediately. I had a call from R. K. Bliss, director of the State Extension Service. His call was not exactly complimentary, and a couple of hours later, Lee Nutty, my district supervisor, arrived. It was decided that I had to apologize to the state committee. I don't remember the exact form the apology was in, but I do know that we got our quotas almost immediately. (I also learned that it's a good thing to be very discreet when visiting with a newspaper reporter.)

**W**ITH THE QUOTAS finally out, we quickly did a blanket cut of four percent on corn and cut down some of the questionable hog contracts. This placed our total contracts within the allotted quotas. A week later we had all the contracts filled out. Farmers would sign the final contracts at township locations. Anyone who was not satisfied with a contract, however, was to come to the county office on Friday or Saturday.

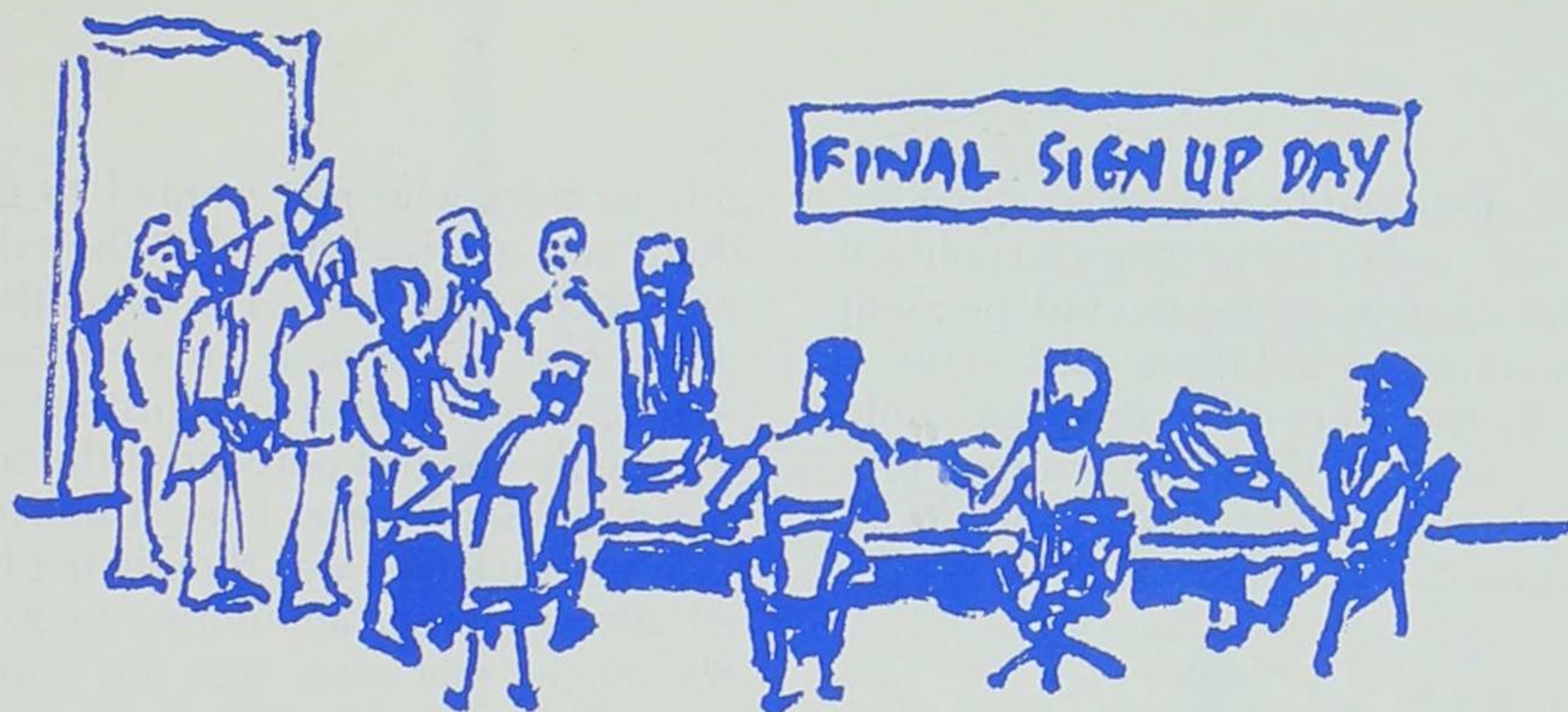
Thursday night, Mortimer told us, "You better be down here pretty early in the morning, because I believe we are going to be pretty busy."

I made it a point to be at the office about seven A.M., and there were already about fifty people in the courthouse lobby. By eight when we opened our doors, there must have been two hundred excited people milling about. Fred Fry, on the allotment committee, arrived late at 8:30. To bypass the crowd in the lobby we let him in through a ground-floor window.

We had anticipated such a rush, and the procedure set up proved successful. John Goodrich, the chairman from Linn Township, was posted at the front door with two of the tabulators to meet farmers one by one. Mistakes in typing or addition on the contract were corrected on the spot by the tabulators. About







a third of the complaints were of this nature.

As the morning wore on, Goodrich, assisted by tabulator Jim Brown, took on other complaints, and about a half of those were fixed up in short order. The really tough cases were admitted one by one to the inner office, where the allotment committee was divided into two groups in session.

Only a few people were really irate. Many of the special cases involved estates, and these contracts all had to be accompanied by court orders. I had taken them up to the clerk of court. Just as I was wondering what had happened to these contracts, I was called up to Judge E. W. Dingwell's chambers. There sat a couple of local attorneys. These men were all dyed-in-the-wool Republicans, and they proceeded to give me a hard time about the Corn-Hog Program, a "foolish Democrat program," they called it. I was not sure whether I was being baited or not, but I stood my ground quietly. Finally the judge signed the court orders, grudgingly, I thought.

By working through the noon hour, we cleared the halls by five o'clock on Friday. Saturday was almost a repeat, but we knew what our problems would be and moved through the process quickly. By three o'clock, all but four or five of the 2,063 contracts were signed and ready to go to Des Moines.

**W**E WERE THE SECOND COUNTY in the state to get our contracts to the state office, and the fourth to get our money. As I look back, perhaps we were too concerned with getting our contracts in speedily and getting the checks to the farmers. But when I think back to the desperate

financial conditions of that time, I can still feel the urgency of our work.

The county committee felt that most of the farmers had been fundamentally honest in establishing their bases. There were not more than twenty-five cases where actual dishonesty was suspected and probably present. Farmers on the committees knew their neighbors very well, and while two or three of these cases were very unpleasant to deal with, the county committee took care of them in good shape.

The drought of 1934, plainly in evidence before the contracts were all signed, took care of one of our big problems — there was almost a complete crop failure in Dallas County, and *none* of the diversion acres had to be measured to see if farmers were in compliance with their contracts. The hogs did have to be counted later on in the year. The national press had some horror stories about "little pigs being killed in the corn belt." The only cases I remember in Dallas County were when farmers' sows favored them by giving birth to too many pigs, and in a few cases, four or five little pigs had to be killed. I doubt, however, if more than one hundred pigs were killed in Dallas County, and I would guess that most of these were runts who would never have lived to go to market.

About 85 percent of the farmers in Dallas County participated in the Corn-Hog Program that year — representing about 90 percent of the corn land and 93 percent of the hogs raised. The farmers who didn't enter the program — there were not many — chose not to for a number of reasons. Quite often because of crop rotations or changes in operation, their corn acreage was not representative and they didn't



have enough allotment to make it worthwhile. A few were opposed to the program on political grounds, and a few were just too independent to let the government tell them what to do.

Farmers in the Corn-Hog Program could also take advantage of the new corn loan program, whereby a farmer could use stored corn on his farm as collateral. First, a licensed sealer



would come out to a farm to officially "seal" the corn in a crib. This meant nailing a small metal sign across the door. The sign warned against tampering with the sealed crib and stated penalties. Then the corn sealer measured the crib and calculated the number of bushels. Paperwork was completed in our office. At a local bank a farmer could be loaned forty-five cents per bushel of sealed corn. Participating farmers had three choices: sell the corn later and pay off the loan with interest; buy back the corn with interest for their own use; or deliver the corn to the government as full payment on the loan. In Dallas County nearly 2,300 corn loans were closed, with an aggregate total of over \$1.4 million.

**A**LTHOUGH IT IS still exciting to look back on that year of emergency Agricultural Adjustment Act programs, it is impossible to reproduce the spirit and the emotions. The Corn-Hog Program was a ray of hope in a dark sky, and in Dallas County at least, farmers accepted it enthusiastically.

The program was effectively carried out by

dirt farmers who just wanted to get the job done and get back to what they did best — raising corn and hogs. The committee and the office staff were paid very nominal hourly wages, and our total administrative expenses were only about 2 percent of the total money received. Some years later, I noticed that the county in which I was then living had administrative expenses amounting to 50 percent of the money that came into the county. But in Dallas County in 1934 bureaucracy had not yet arrived. A group of competent people had worked conscientiously for a program that they believed would lead them out of the Great Depression.

The old courthouse office must still echo with the feverish activities of some sixty years ago. I remember especially that Friday in June when we finished the contracts of the farmers crowded in the lobby. I can see Fred Fry climbing in late through the window. I can see John Goodrich placating angry farmers in the outer office. I can see Glenn Rowe cracking his knuckles as he weighed an important decision. I can see Max Gutshall kidding Ralph Mortimer about the poor land in Adel Township. There was fun mixed in with the work, too. What a relief when the contracts were all carted down to Des Moines, and what a relief when the first checks arrived in rural mailboxes across the county. From that first program Dallas County farmers received about \$387,000 as diversion payments on corn acreage and about \$486,000 as payments for hogs not raised.

**Y**ET IT IS PROBABLE that the drought of 1934 did more than the Corn-Hog Program in reducing production of corn and hogs. Although 1933 had been a fairly normal season, and the crop yields reasonably good, there had been some signs that year of what was to follow.

I remember one warm day in May 1933, for instance, when I drove all over the county with my lights on and my windows rolled up because of a dust storm. Cornfields had recently been harrowed, and the wind blew fine particles of soil through the air. Most every farmer was out stripping the cornfields, cultivating





"I remember one warm day," writes the author, "when I drove all over the county with my lights on and my windows rolled up. . . . You couldn't see the sun, and visibility was almost zero." Above, a dust storm in the early 1930s.

rows about thirty feet apart. This seemed to stop the worst of the wind erosion. If the field had not been planted, the farmer disced rows at intervals across the field to try and stop the dust.

All that day — and there were a few others like that — you couldn't see the sun, and visibility was almost zero. Other times in 1933 you could see dust clouds on the southwestern horizon. Sometimes these clouds were almost red. The story was that this was soil from eastern Oklahoma. If it rained, the first rain that came down looked like red paint.

Despite these omens in 1933, the drought of 1934 slipped up on us without much fanfare. No one, except the very old people, could remember when Iowa and Dallas County had had a severe drought. Certainly there had been "dry spells," but nothing calamitous had occurred since the turn of the century. The years 1931 through 1933 had all been rather dry, but there had been rains and they had come at good

times. Crop yields in Dallas County and most of the corn belt were quite adequate. We had heard of drought in the Dakotas, eastern Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma, but these were only rumors as far as we were concerned.

Imagine, then, if you will, a period when no rain falls from March until late fall. This was what happened in Dallas County in 1934. On top of this the temperatures were much higher than normal. Some days in May the temperature passed a hundred, and it seemed like there was always wind — hot, burning wind. The oats and grass seed planted in March and April never germinated but lay in dry soil. Pastures dried up almost before they had a chance to turn green. Some corn came up, but it did poorly. And then came the chinch bugs.

Apparently there had been some chinch bugs the years before, but they had done relatively little damage. These small, black, leaf-eating bugs wintered over in permanent pastures or wheat fields. In normal summers,





(From left): Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, *Register* farm editor J. S. Russell, and R. M. Evans, chair of the state Corn-Hog Committee, inspect Iowa's 1934 corn crop. Drought caused almost complete crop failure in Dallas County that year.

there is enough grass to give them all they need. But 1934 was not normal. By the first of June, the chinch bugs started to move into the cornfields.

None of us had any experience in combating chinch bugs, even the specialist at Iowa State. At first, to prevent the bugs from marching into the cornfields, we plowed single furrows as barriers. Next the farmer hitched a post to a horse or tractor and pulled the post back and forth down the furrow, pulverizing the soil to a mass of very fine dust. Every fifteen or twenty feet, a small posthole would be dug. The theory was that the chinch bugs didn't like to cross the dust and they would crawl up and down the furrow until they would fall into the posthole. Soon it was clear that this was not a very effective method of control.

The next method tried was pouring a strip of creosote oil on one side of the ditch to further discourage the chinch bugs. The government shipped three carloads of creosote oil into

Dallas County that summer. The local Work Relief Program loaned us some workers to help dispense the volatile oil from the tank cars parked in Van Meter, DeSoto, and Redfield. On hot days the fumes were irritating, and in one instance a relief worker had to have his eyes treated. I'm sure more barrels of creosote were hauled home by farmers than were ever used against chinch bugs. Twenty-five years later there were still farmers with creosote oil in their machine sheds.

The chinch bug war did not last long, for two reasons. First, when chinch bugs learn to fly, their appetites are largely gone. They fly into the cornfields and lay eggs, but the second crop of chinch bugs usually does considerably less damage. And once they can fly, there's nothing much you can do to control them anyway. Second, the corn just burned up. In many fields, there wasn't any corn to save.

Because all the crops had dried up, there was hardly any cultivating to be done. There was very little hay made. There was no threshing. There were no weeds to contend with. On many farms there weren't too many things that could be done. The county 4-H club agent, Joe Beving, and I decided we would start a softball program among the boys' clubs. We played a regular summer schedule, had a county tournament, and sent an all-star team to the state tournament. The teams not only gave the boys something to do, but I'm certain that they swelled our membership in 4-H.

**I**N THE LATE SUMMER, the government came in with a cattle-buying program. The first cattle sale I saw was in Creston, and farmers brought in four or five hundred head. For the cattle that could be butchered for meat, the government paid packinghouse prices plus a small bonus. Many of the cattle were simply too starved and emaciated to be worth anything, but the government still paid a minimum price for these. About a hundred of the worst of these cattle were simply trucked out to a huge grave west of town, shot, and bulldozed over with dirt. At a later sale in Adel, only about a hundred cattle were brought in. Fortunately all of them had some meat value.

Pastureland in Dallas County was mostly





W.J. NORRIS COLLECTION (SHS-IOWA CITY)

County agricultural agents helped coordinate extension, 4-H, and Farm Bureau demonstrations and meetings. "Rocky times' had created more interest in small fruit management problems," wrote W. J. Norris, county agent for Benton County in his 1932 annual report. Above, a demonstrator prunes black raspberry canes for an interested audience.

devoid of cover. Livestock had literally eaten the grass into the ground. The county was really half southern Iowa, with hills, timber, and much livestock, and half northern Iowa, with much level, fertile soil and to some extent a cash-grain area. In the southern part, most of that year's corn had little value for anything but fodder — and there wasn't even much of that. In some northern areas, in rare instances farmers got as much as ten or fifteen bushels to the acre. The oats crop and other small-grain yields were almost nil. The total amount of feed grown in Dallas County was not nearly enough to support its normal livestock population.

By fall 1934 it was obvious that more emergency measures were needed. The government had a small emergency feed and seed loan program to furnish feed for livestock herds farmers were trying to keep intact. Working through private buyers and sellers, we shipped in several carloads of hay from northern Iowa. It didn't seem quite right to be paying twenty

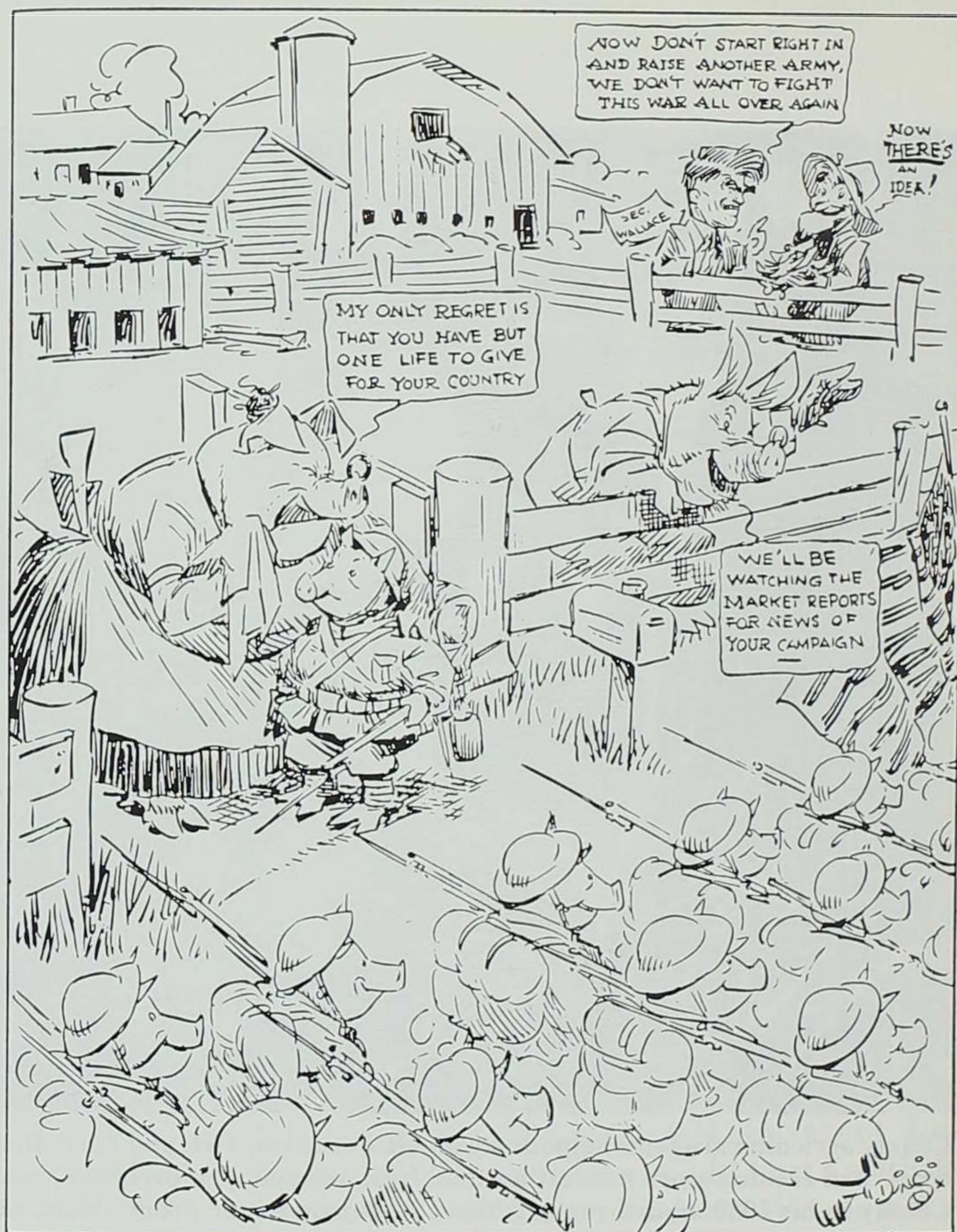
to forty dollars a ton for foxtail hay, but that was what happened that fall.

For emergency seed loans for the next season's hay crop, we looked into soybeans, which were just beginning to be grown in Dallas County. Soybeans make excellent high-protein hay if cut with a mower just when the first lower leaves are starting to turn yellow, raked with a dump rake, and bunched into small cocks to cure. So we set up a plan to buy soybean seed and distribute it through the Dallas County Cooperative Elevator. We bought and shipped in from Illinois over five carloads of bulk soybeans to be used for seed for emergency hay. Our office was very busy during the fall and winter making emergency feed and seed loans, first through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and later through the Farm Credit Administration.

We hadn't distributed very many soybeans for seed before we found horse nettle seeds in them. Horse nettle seeds are in little pods



"OFF TO THE ECONOMIC WAR" by Des Moines Register cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling (August 23, 1933)



about the size of soybeans, so it's hard to separate them out. There was really quite a furor for a while. Farmers wondered why the county agent and Farm Bureau would bring in seed full of noxious weeds. I knew that farmer Lloyd Roland had developed a small business of going around to farms and doing custom cleaning of seed oats and soybeans with a gas-powered fanning mill. We made a deal with Roland. He cleaned all the soybeans that had already been distributed to six or seven hundred farms. Finally, Dallas County farmers had about ten thousand bushels of clean soybeans to plant for emergency hay in the spring of 1935.

**W**ITH 1935 came rain and good crops, although the lack of ground cover or crop residue had severely increased erosion. Forces were also at work eroding the partnership between the Farm

Bureau, the Extension Service, and the government programs. They would soon have separate offices and separate personnel, but that is another story.

By the end of 1935, I had been county agent for three years — and had attended meetings of some kind on nearly half of those nights. Working with county and township committees, our office had successfully administered AAA emergency programs of a scope hitherto undreamed of. I had played a part in helping Florence Williams and Joe Beving develop an exceptionally strong program in extension work and 4-H and township Farm Bureau meetings. These successes were partly due to the spirit of the time, but mostly due to the money and excellent personnel funneled into extension work in those "emergency years." There was never a spirit of defeatism or complacency. The most credit, however, must go to the people of Dallas County, who rose to



high levels of leadership and responsibility to make these programs succeed.

Now by the end of 1935, we had entered a period of hope and prosperity. People seemed to have acquired a new faith in agriculture and eagerly availed themselves of all of the many opportunities. But I was experiencing a let-down feeling now that the emergency programs were over. Then a job offer coincided with my reluctance to settle down into more routine county extension work. I decided to take the new job as extension farm management specialist in Ames.

On December 31, 1935, for the last time, I

closed the rolltop desk and locked my office door. I had met nearly two thousand people in Dallas County. Most of them had been in that office, one time or another. And our staff had literally taken our programs to the people. I had been on nearly all the farms in Dallas County. In many cases, I knew all the members of the farm families. I felt sincerely that most of these people were my friends. And with these good people, I had shared the traumas and triumphs of 1933 through 1935. We had survived the drought and we had emerged from the depths of the Great Depression. ☐

[Next page: A county agent's day out of the office!]

### CORN-HOG SONG

By H. F. MILLER, County Agent, Poweshiek County

Henry was a farmer so the story goes  
He lived in the state where the tall corn grows,  
He worked from early morning till the stars began to shine  
For the last ten years he never made a dime.  
He raised a lot of corn and about a thousand hogs  
Yet every year he felt himself going to the dogs.  
He mortgaged all his property and tried to make it pay  
But soon found out he couldn't farm that way.

Chorus:

Henry Jones, better cut production  
Henry Jones, you're doing not so well  
Henry Jones, better cut production  
If you don't start reducing you will end in—————

The market goin' lower, Henry's gettin' blue  
'Cause the time was fast approaching when the mortgage was due  
Said Henry to Mirandy, "This is more than I can stand."  
When along came Wallace with his Corn-Hog plan.  
He called up the sealer and borrowed on his corn  
Paid his interest and taxes, just as sure as you're born.  
Started workin' on his work sheet, says, "We've got to leave the ruts."  
And he figured and he figured till he nearly went nuts.

Chorus:

Henry Jones, sharpen up your pencil  
Henry Jones, you're doin' fine  
Henry Jones, keep right on a figurin'  
And it won't be long until we're all in line.

Says Henry to Mirandy, "What'll I do now?  
I can't find the place I sold the old red sow."  
He wrinkled up his forehead and scratched his old dome  
And finally figured out the sow was still at home.  
He kept on a-workin' he was at it night and day.  
But he didn't seem to mind it for he knew that it would pay.  
He signed up the contract and he put it in the mail.  
Said, "We're pullin' all together and we know it can't fail.

Chorus:

Henry Jones, now we're all reducin'  
Henry Jones, prices bound to rise  
Henry Jones, clouds are disappearing  
And we all come out beneath the sunny skies.