

Farm Policy History and Current Lessons

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Farm Foundation Round Table

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Three U.S. Presidents Who Showed Us the Way

- Historians rank a handful of U.S. presidents as the most effective leaders during their time
- That list generally includes the following:
 - George Washington
 - Abraham Lincoln
 - Theodore Roosevelt
 - Franklin Roosevelt
 - Thomas Jefferson
- Perhaps not coincidentally, three of those Presidents were responsible for some of the important legislation affecting U.S. agriculture in our nearly 250-year history

Colonial and Post Revolution Beginnings

- Royal Charters for the original English colonies varied widely over how land was to be distributed
 - Initially land was reserved for the Crown
 - Jamestown and Plymouth Colonies soon allowed private ownership of land
 - First private deeds to Virginia land date to 1618
- Headright system developed – to promote settlement
 - 50 acres (sometimes more) of land to anyone who could pay their passage
 - Wealthy people could pay for several indentured servants and collect all the headrights – Indentured people eventually received some land
 - Helped start the system of large land holdings in the South

Colonial and Post Revolution Beginnings

- William Penn and Cecil Calvert were given almost complete control over land distribution in Pennsylvania and Maryland
 - Calvert gave large land grants and required landowners to be able to defend themselves
 - Calvert would not sell land to the church
 - Penn retained to 50-acre limit – mostly
 - Penn required that some forest land be preserved
- Special land grants
 - Military service
 - Churches and Schools
 - Industrial development – sawmills, flour mills, iron works, ferries, etc.



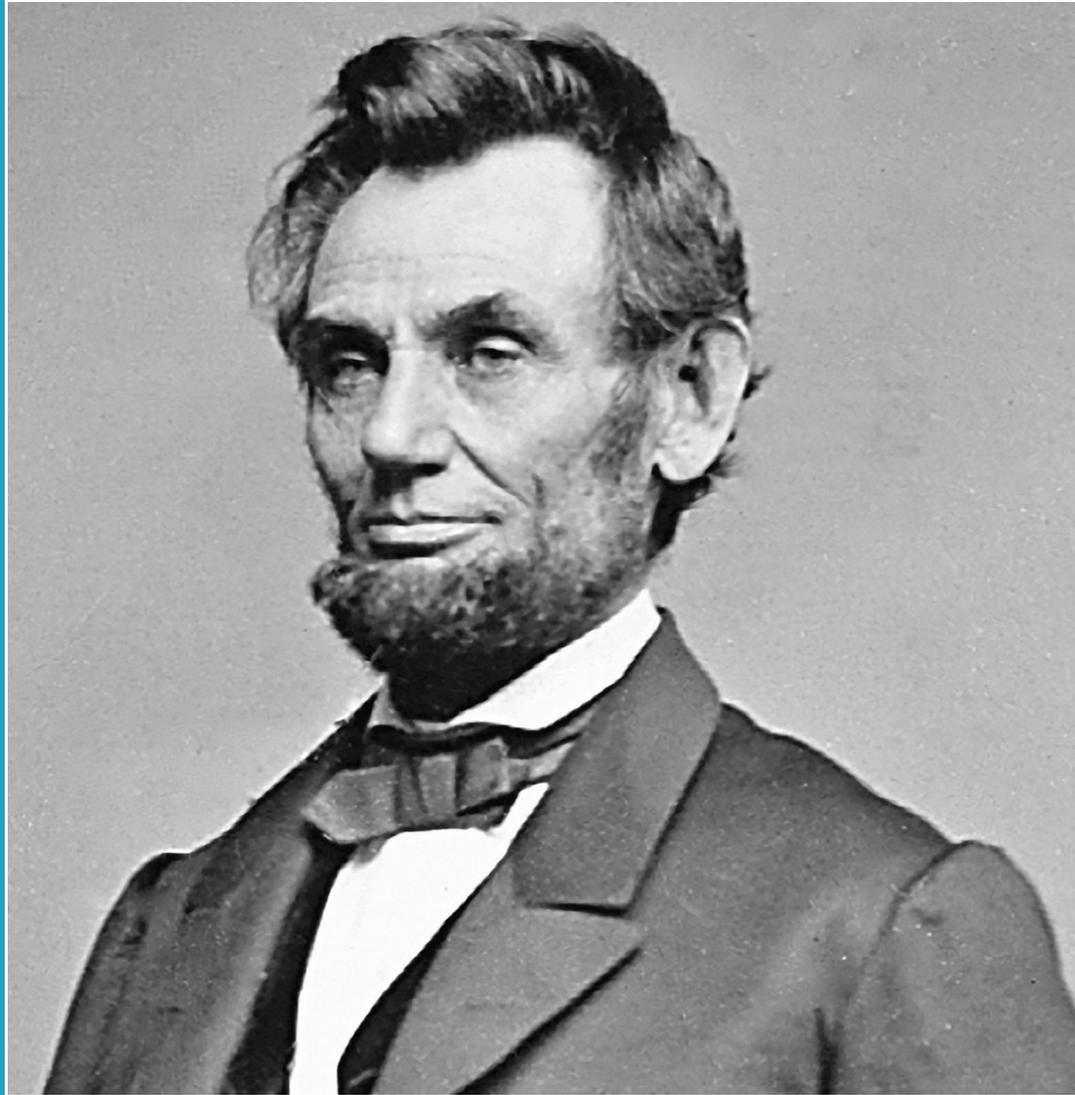
William Penn, founder of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Colonial and Post Revolution Beginnings

- English had forbidden westward migration without much success
- Post revolution, western migration intensified
- Several colonies had claims to western lands
- Who controlled the land and how do we distribute it?
- As U.S. trade commissioner in 1784, Thomas Jefferson convinced the Virginia legislature to give up their claims to the western land and other colonies followed suit
- Ordinance of 1785 – Continental Congress
 - Established a uniform land survey system
 - Set minimum price of land at \$1 per acre
 - Set aside one section of land in each township for education

Colonial and Post Revolution Beginnings

- Significance of the uniform rectangular land survey system
- Replaced the old Metes and Bounds system that was prone to errors and disputes – property boundaries became fixed points rather than points in nature (trees, rocks, creeks, etc.)
- Helped organize local government in the new territories.
 - A Township was six miles square. Many states in Northeast and Midwest still recognize township form of government (sub-county level)
- Set the standard for land sales
 - Minimum price \$1 per acre
 - Minimum land sale – one section – one mile square – 640 acres
 - Few settlers had \$640. Help set a system of sale and resale in smaller plots
 - Established the tension between the free/cheap land forces (North) and the larger farm forces (South) that was not resolved till the Civil War and the Homestead Act.



16th President, Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)

THE 48 DAYS THAT KICK-STARTED U.S. AGRICULTURE

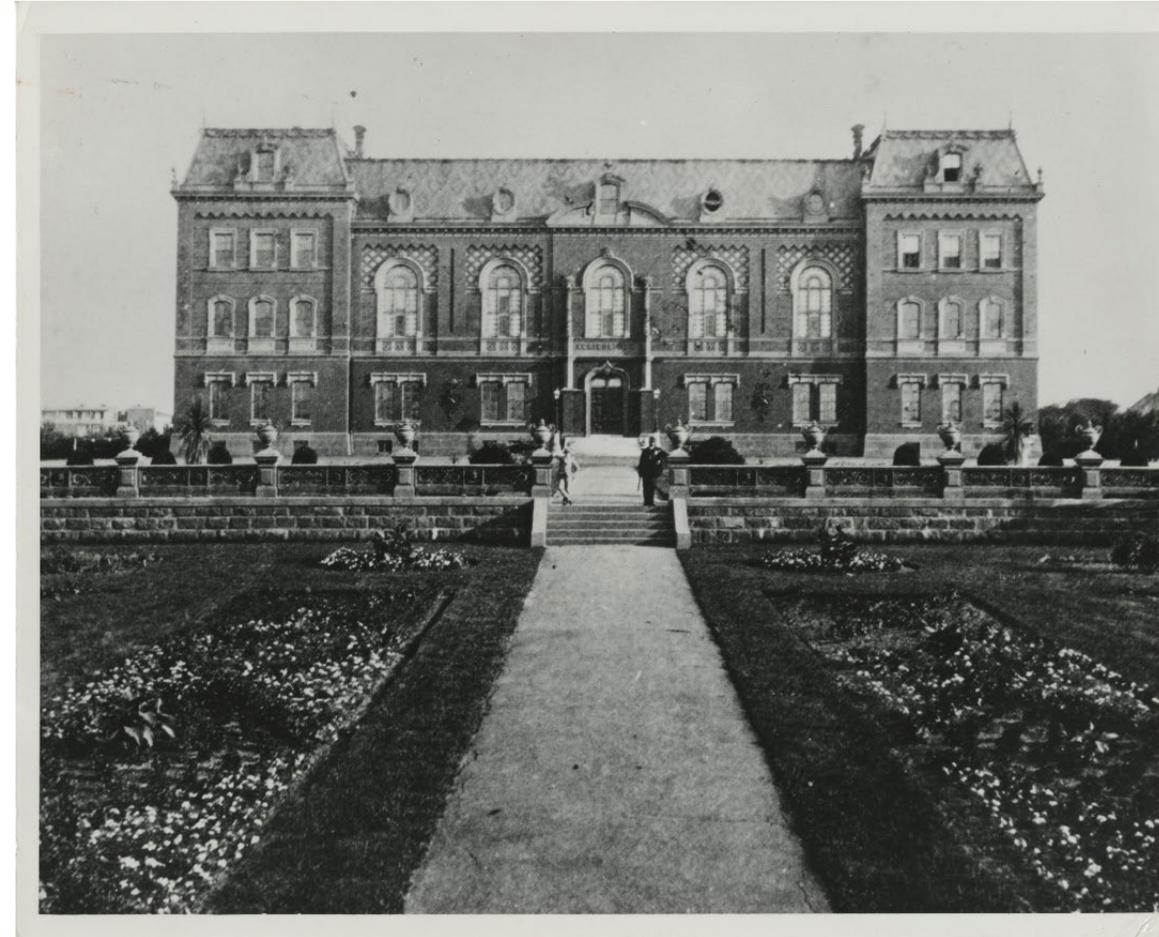
- FDR's "100 Days" legislative push in early 1933 is well-known in policy circles for giving U.S. agriculture an important set of policy tools for addressing the twin disasters of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl
- Between May 15th and July 2nd in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed four key pieces of legislation that gave U.S. agriculture the strong resource and scientific foundation it still relies on today

Key Ag Policy Accomplishments of President Lincoln

- May 15—legislation establishing the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- May 20—the Homestead Act—opened up lands in the West for settlement and cultivation
- July 1—the Pacific Railroad Act—provided resources to join the east and west coasts by rail
- July 2—Morrill Act—established land grant university system

USDA ESTABLISHED IN 1862

- Prior to this legislation, agricultural matters had been handled by staff in the Agricultural Division of the U.S. Patent Office
 - ◆ Primary role of propagating and distributing seeds to the public
- Not initially a cabinet-level agency—headed by a commissioner, not secretary
- First commissioner was Mr. Isaac Newton, a PA dairy farmer who had sold ice cream to the White House
 - ◆ Set up division of statistics
- Designated by Congress as cabinet level agency in 1889



First USDA building completed in 1868.

THE MIGRATION OF THE USDA EXPERIMENTAL FARM

Reflects early history of the Department

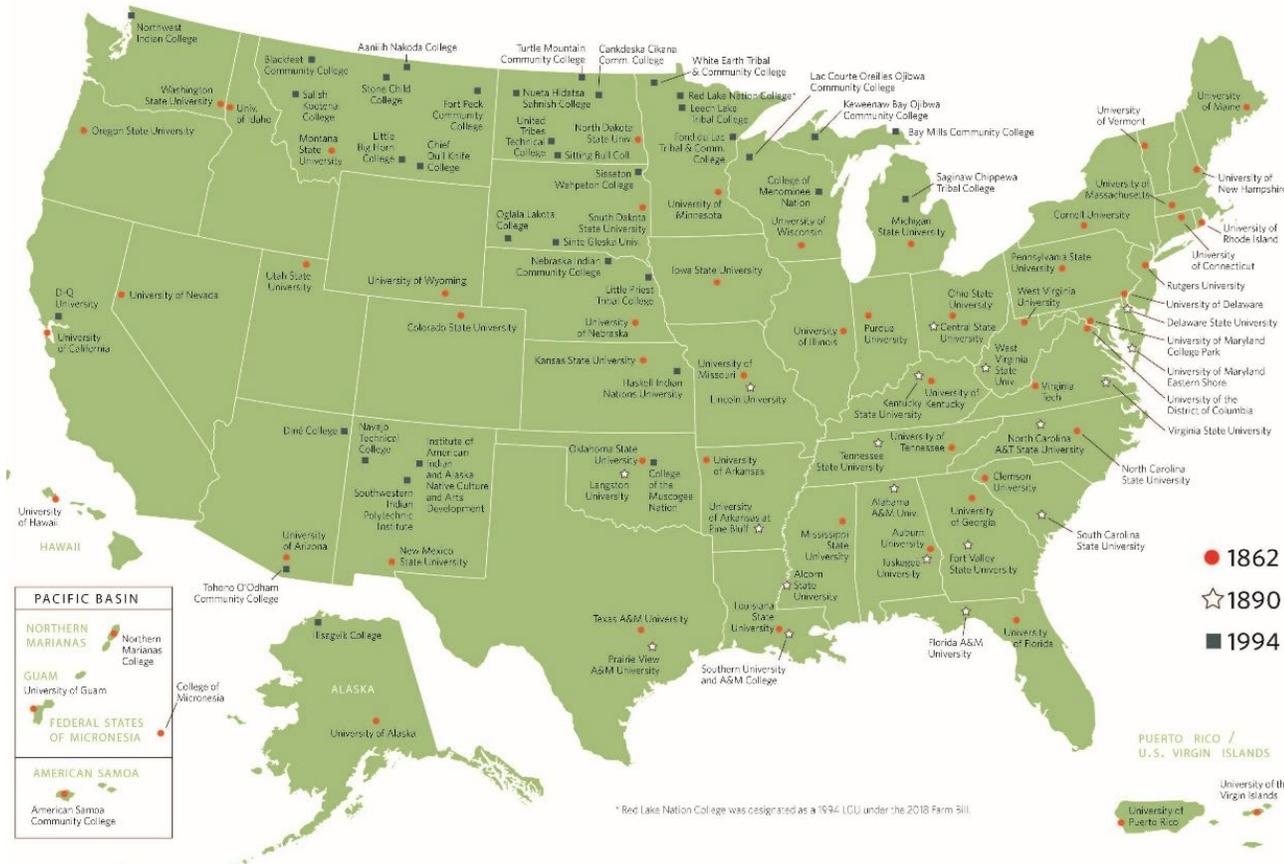
- The Agricultural Division of U.S. Patent Office operated a farm on what is now the National Mall in Washington DC, propagating seeds for distribution around the country. Taken over by USDA in 1864.
- Operations moved to Arlington, VA in 1900, including new greenhouse and other lab facilities for staff of the Bureau of Plant Industry. Situated at the edge of the Custis-Lee estate.
- Farm was moved to Beltsville, MD in early 1940's, after FDR signed legislation assigning the grounds for construction of a new airport.
 - ◆ National Airport was eventually built further down the Potomac River near Alexandria
 - ◆ Arlington Farm site used to construct temporary housing for single female employees of the Department of War and other federal agencies during World War II.
 - ◆ Buildings demolished in 1960's, grounds added to Arlington National Cemetery.



Arlington Farm in 1907.

ESTABLISHING THE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Morrill Act of 1862



- Similar legislation had been passed in 1859 but vetoed by President Buchanan. Southern Senators did not see education as a federal matter
- The phrase 'land-grant' derives from provision giving each state 30K acres of public land for each member of Congress to fund educational activities
- First land-grant was given to Iowa State by fall of 1862, first new land grant was Kansas State in 1863

Locations of Land Grant Institutions in U.S.

EXPANSION OF LAND GRANT SYSTEM



Second Morrill Act passed in 1890—barred states from discriminating against students, but allowed option of establishing separate institutions for African Americans and keeping their principal land grant segregated.



Nineteen states opted for segregated institutions, including seven states outside of the South, mostly in border region (TN, KY, WV, MO, MD, OH, DE, OK)



At the time, 12 of the states gave land-grant status to existing public black colleges, 7 established new institutions.



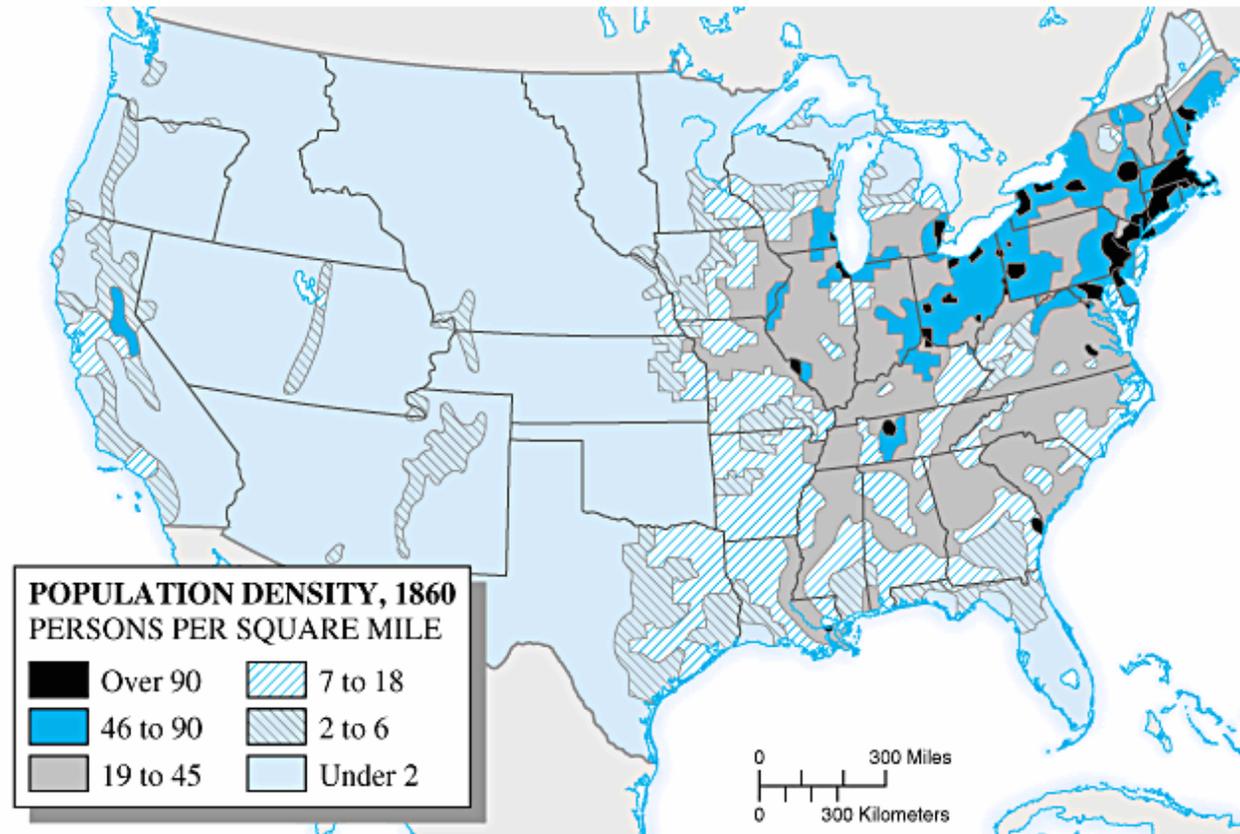
Tribal colleges gained access to land-grant status in 1994, and Hispanic-serving institutions in 1998.



Today, there are 106 land grant institutions in the U.S., at least one in each state plus the District of Columbia and six overseas U.S. territories and possessions.

SNAPSHOT OF U.S. DEMOGRAPHICS IN 1862

- Just prior to the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, there were 31.2 million people estimated to live in the United States
 - ◆ That figure included just under 4 million slaves, but not native Americans living primarily in the West
- 84 percent of those people lived east of the Mississippi River, in the original 13 colonies plus 11 new states in the region
- Population center of country was in south-central Ohio



POLICY ENVIRONMENT LEADING UP TO THE PASSAGE OF THE HOMESTEAD ACT OF 1862

- The land area of the United States at the time of the Civil War was about 1.9 billion acres
 - ◆ 25 states that stayed in the Union
 - ◆ 11 states that joined the Confederacy
 - ◆ 4 Western territories
 - ◆ Alaska acquired by purchase from Russia right after Civil War (1867)
- The most densely populated region east of the Mississippi River accounted for just under one-third of the country's land area
- Federal government had passed several laws during the first half of the 19th century trying to sell more of those public lands
- Homestead Act failed to pass Congress in three previous attempts in 1850's due to opposition from members from Southern states. Vetoed after 1860 passage by President Buchanan.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE HOMESTEAD ACT OF 1862

- Finally passed and signed into law on May 20, 1862 by President Lincoln after Southern states left to join Confederacy
- Took effect on January 1, 1863
- Allowed any American man or woman aged 21 or older who headed household to claim up to 160 acres of unappropriated land in 30 named “public domain” states
 - ◆ Open to freed slaves
 - ◆ Open to immigrants declaring intention to become U.S. citizens
- Had to pay modest fee to register claim, then live on and cultivate land for 5 years to “prove” their claim

Photo of the Palmer-Eppard cabin on the grounds of the Homestead National Historical Park near Beatrice, NE



HOMESTEAD ACT BY THE NUMBERS

→ Between 253 and 270 million acres allocated to claimants during the Act's lifetime (1862-1976)

- ◆ 783,000 successful claims (only 40% of total number initially registered)
- ◆ Highest share of land homesteaded was in Nebraska—45 percent
- ◆ Highest number of acres homesteaded was in Montana—32 million acres
- ◆ Accounted for 17 percent of available public lands in lower 48 states

Top ten states by millions of acres homesteaded

Montana	32.05
Nebraska	22.25
Colorado	22.15
New Mexico	19.42
Wyoming	18.22
North Dakota	17.42
South Dakota	15.66
Oklahoma	14.86
Kansas	13.09
Oregon	10.51

Source: *Homestead National Historic Park website*



IMPACT OF WESTERN LAND EXPANSION ON U.S. AGRICULTURE

- As of 1870, there were 407.7 million acres of farmland in the United States
- By 1900, that figure had more than doubled, to 841 million
- Additional land under cultivation stemmed not just from Homestead Act, but also land distributed under Morrill Act and Pacific Railroad Act
- Gross value of U.S. agricultural output (crops and livestock) more than tripled in constant dollars, from \$2.18 billion to \$6.41 billion, over the same period.

TRAVELING FROM EAST TO WEST DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

→ Prior to completion of the Trans-Pacific Railroad in 1869, travelers had three time-consuming options for getting from the East to West Coast:

- ◆ Via wagon train from Missouri or Kansas (5 months)
- ◆ Via ship around Cape Horn in south America (5 months)
- ◆ Via ships and by horse or mule over the Isthmus of Panama (1-2 months)

→ After 1869, a train trip across the country took a week or less, at cost of \$100 per person



Length of ocean-going routes between New York and San Francisco

PACIFIC RAILROAD ACT OF 1862

- Passed and signed by President Lincoln on July 1, 1862
- As was the case with the Homestead Act, its passage during 1850's was resisted by Southern members of Congress due to dispute over route
- The Act authorized issuance of 30-year government bonds to companies to finance the project
- Also gave companies ownership of alternate sections of public land along the railroad lines right-of-ways
- Total impact of government land grants to railroads (including earlier efforts in Eastern U.S.) was 175 million acres transferred.



Route of the Trans-Continental Railroad completed in 1869

BUILDING A TRANS-CONTINENTAL RAILROAD

- The Central Pacific (CP) Railroad, working from California east, started in January 1863
 - ◆ They used mainly Chinese immigrants as workers
- The Union Pacific (UP) Railroad, working west from Omaha, got a later start because availability of men and materials was constrained due to ongoing Civil War
 - ◆ They used mainly Irish immigrants as workers, many of them former Union soldiers
- The two lines joined up at Promontory Point, Utah in May, 1869
- Even though the CP got an earlier start, they laid fewer miles of track overall because they more often had to blast through mountains to create track beds than did the UP

IMPACT OF TRANS-CONTINENTAL RAILROAD ON U.S. AGRICULTURE

- Total U.S. rail mileage grew from 9,000 miles a decade prior to Civil War (1851) to more than 158,000 miles in 1890.
- Total freight volume also exploded
 - ◆ 2.17 billion ton-miles in 1865
 - ◆ 141.6 billion ton-miles in 1900
- Significant share of freight was agricultural, including grain, timber, and live animals
- Invention of “reefer” refrigerated cars allowed carrying of dressed meat from Chicago packing houses after 1880



Reefer car built in Detroit MI in 1899

Turn of the 20th Century

- Homesteading of the West was virtually complete
 - The only land available was land with little access to water
- Technology was having an impact
 - The John Deere plow
 - Threshers
 - Railroads
 - Refrigeration
 - Pasteurization of milk
- Immigration was increasing the demand for food
- National and Regional Markets for basic grains were growing

Agricultural Policy Accomplishments of Theodore Roosevelt

- Main one was not actual legislation, but TR's role in establishing the so-called Country Life Commission in 1908 to study the status of U.S. agriculture
- As President, Roosevelt signed into law two key pieces of food safety legislation:
 - Meat Inspection Act of 1906
 - Food and Drug Act of 1906
- Was known as the Conservation President for his interest in preserving the natural environment
 - Shifted Forest Service from Interior to Agriculture Department
 - Enabled passage of the American Antiquities Act

Prelude to “Country Life” Commission

- In the last decade of the 19th century, the United States suffered from a 4-year economic depression, sparked by the bankruptcy of a major railroad (Reading Railroad) in 1893.
- Four million Americans lost jobs, but no federal assistance forthcoming
- Major crop prices fell - corn price fell 56 percent between 1891 and 1896.



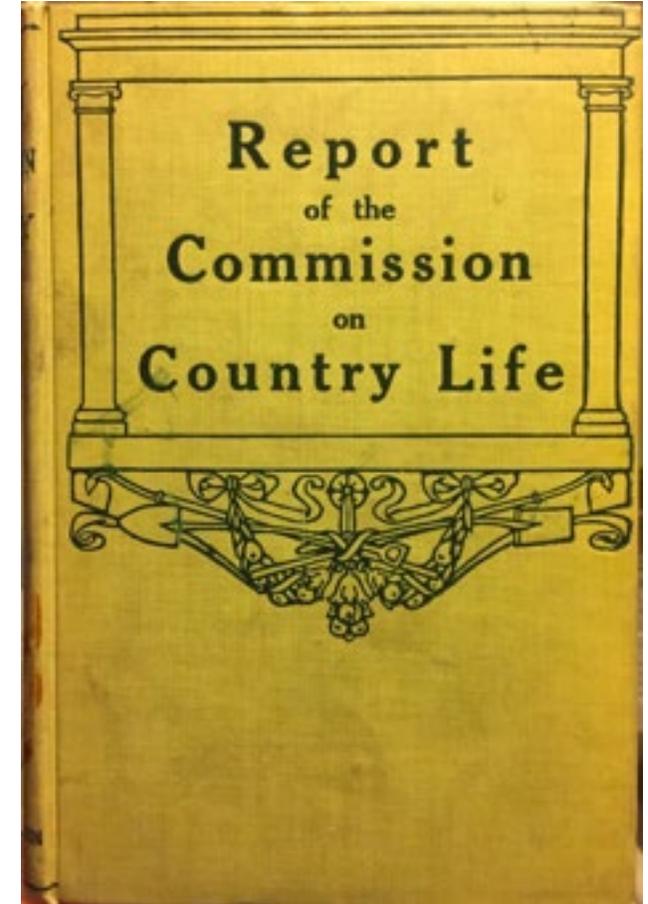
Reading Railroad train leaving Gordon PA station

Setting up the Commission

- 1893 recession had been over for several years when Vice President Theodore Roosevelt took office in late 1901 after President McKinley's assassination, but concerns about its impact had lingered in some circles. Spurred to take this action by a few individuals.
 - ◆ Gifford Pinchot, head of the newly established Forest Service (personal friend)
 - ◆ Liberty Bailey, dean of the College of Agriculture at Cornell University
- In his 1908 announcement, Roosevelt emphasized his belief that rural America was “the backbone of our nation's efficiency”, but it is at risk of being left behind.
- Subsequent tariff levels subject to regional disputes among members of Congress
- His words echoed themes of agricultural populist groups such as the National Grange and Farmers Alliance
- Commissioners included Pinchot and Bailey (chair), as well as a college president, president of a farmers' cooperative union, and three magazine editors.

Country Life Commission's Activities

- During 1908, the Commission held 30 public hearings around the country
- They also solicited responses to a 12-question survey circulated by the USDA
 - ◆ 550,000 sent out
 - ◆ 120,000 responses received
- Completed their report in January 1909, presented to President Roosevelt



Findings of the Country Life Commission

The Commission members identified the following general and immediate needs of country life:

- Effective cooperation among farmers
- New kinds of schools, which teach children indoors and outdoors, to prepare for country life,
- Better means of communications, including access to good roads and parcel post,
- Labor shortages, inadequate access to credit, and lack of supervision of public health were also spotlighted

The Commissioners deliberately avoided politically sensitive issues, such as the role of churches, role of immigrants, and the treatment of former slaves and their descendants in the rural South.

Impact of the Commission's report

- Did not spur broad public interest, because Congress declined to provide funding to print and circulate the report
- Source material ordered destroyed by Agriculture Secretary Houston during President Wilson's first term
- Nonetheless, several of the concerns identified in the report were subsequently addressed by Congress, in legislation such as:
 - ◆ The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 (cooperative extension)
 - ◆ Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (vocational education)
 - ◆ Farm Loan Act of 1916



Impact of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*

- Key part of Progressive effort to focus attention on poor working conditions in meatpacking sector was *the Jungle*, written by Upton Sinclair
- Book published in 1906
- Sinclair's vivid descriptions of what the largely immigrant workforce had to face everyday prompted public horror, but not on the issue he intended
- Public recoiled at the unsanitary practices that produced the meat they ate, not what the workers had to endure
- Later, Sinclair said ruefully—"I aimed for the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."



A NAUSEATING JOB, BUT IT MUST BE DONE
Roosevelt takes hold of the investigating neck-rake himself in the packing-house scene

President Roosevelt's Reaction to *The Jungle*

- President Roosevelt was not a fan of the corruption-exposing tactics of journalists such as Sinclair
- Referred to them as “muck-rakers”—as a one-time cattle rancher in the Dakota territories, he likely did not intend it as a compliment
- Roosevelt appointed his own two-man commission to validate practices described in Sinclair's book—their findings supported Sinclair's narrative.
- The president's reaction was likely colored by his own experiences during the Spanish-American War with allegedly spoiled beef provided to U.S. soldiers in his service with the Rough Riders.

Meat Inspection Act of 1906

- As of 1891, federal system was in place to inspect live cattle and meat intended for export, but not meat destined for domestic consumption.
- U.S. meatpacking industry had been able to forestall mandatory domestic inspection until 1906, when public concerns stoked by *The Jungle* resulted in new national legislation
- Law did not initially apply to poultry, since there was little commercial poultry production at the time. Poultry included as of 1957.



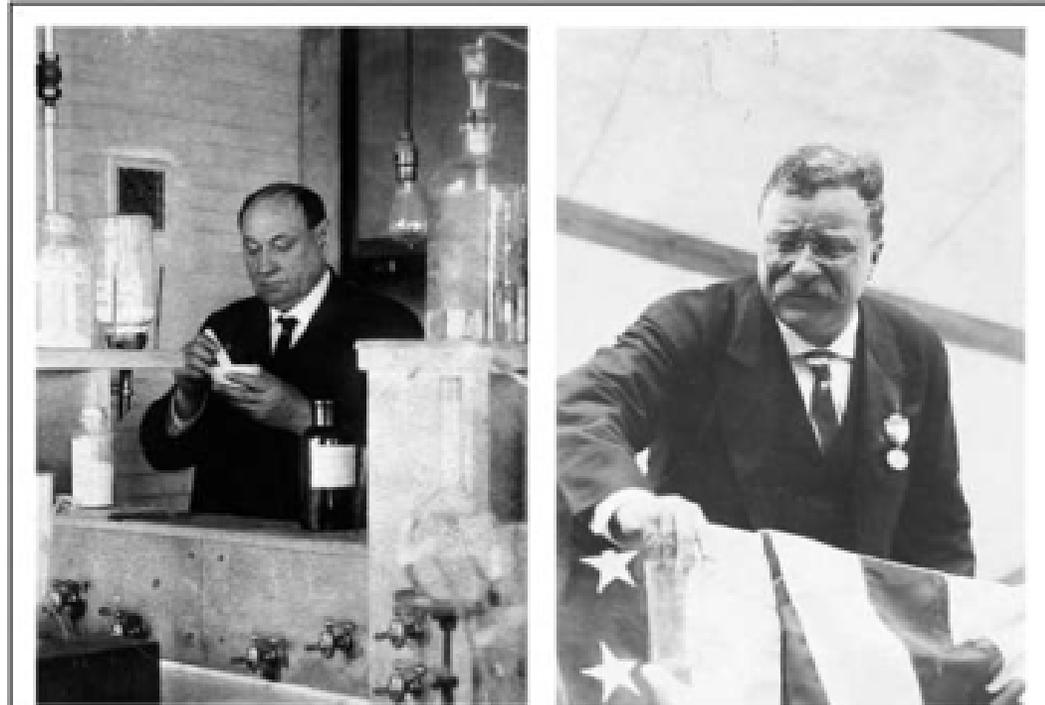
Chicago meatpacking plant at the turn of the 20th century

Ensuring the Safety of U.S. Food - Early Steps

- In the beginning, USDA's Division of Chemistry initially charged with analyzing soils, fertilizer, and other farm chemical inputs.
- Later given responsibility to test grain and grain-based beverage for toxins and other contaminants
- Many states set up their own standards for food and drugs, none of them the same. In 1870's, food industry began to advocate for federal role in order to pre-empt state laws, but also to restrict use of cheaper substitutes (i.e., butter vs. oleomargarine) as food ingredients
- Appointment of Dr. Harvey Wiley (Purdue University) as head of USDA's Division of Chemistry in 1902 helped intensify public pressure
- Set up publicized feeding trials, gave half of subjects wholesome foods and other half products adulterated with sketchy preservatives. Became known as the Poison Squad
- Wiley pushed findings in many public settings, like women's clubs and business groups

Food and Drug Act of 1906

- As a result of Dr. Wiley's efforts, legislation to advance "pure food movement" was moving in Congress even before *The Jungle* was published
- The House Speaker sat on a Senate-passed bill for months until a colleague started describing adulterated food in graphic terms on House floor
- Passed by House in late June 1906, signed by President Roosevelt on the same day he signed the Meat Inspection Act (June 30th)



Harvey W. Wiley, MD (left) and Theodore Roosevelt (right): uneasy allies in the fight for the Pure Food & Drug Act.

Between TR and FDR

- US Grain Standards Act 1916 (P.L. 64-190)
 - Sec. of Ag. given the authority to set nationwide standards for grains
 - Inspections and weighing services
- Capper-Volstead Act 1922 (P.L. 67-146)
 - Exempted farmer owned cooperatives from the Sherman Anti-Trust Act
 - Considered the Magna Carta for U.S. cooperatives
- Packers and Stockyards Act 1921 (P.L. 67-51)
 - Prohibited auction houses from dealing with their own animals
 - Accurate and inspected scales
 - Prompt and bonded payment

FDR's 'New Deal' Policies to Revive U.S. Agriculture

- First Farm Bill—Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933
- Augmented by additional legislation to refine programs
 - Jones-Connally Relief Act of 1934
 - Soil Conservation Act of 1935
- Congress enacted new funding mechanism based on conservation at the farm level (Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, then Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938) after U.S. vs. Butler case
- Additional programs, such as rural electrification and the Civilian Conservation Corps, were also part of the New Deal

Early Policy Responses - Roosevelt Administration

Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933

- **The first farm bill**
- **Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)– established by executive order and later codified**
 - ◆ **Became the “Bank” for agricultural support programs**
 - ◆ **Proceeds from the processor tax went to the CCC, and then could be used by the Secretary of Agriculture to purchase surplus commodities, and make payments to farmers who reduced production**
- **Initial results were positive – Farm income rose**



President Franklin Roosevelt signs Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933

Roosevelt Administration and the Federal Courts

- United States v. Butler 1936 (Supreme Court decision)
 - ◆ A cotton processor objected to the processor tax
- 6-3 decision overturned the law
- The whole scheme of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) violates 10th amendment – Congress does not have the power to regulate in this arena
- Agriculture is **“a purely local activity”**
- Idea – agriculture is not “commerce”
- Ag production is “local,” so it is not commerce
- Consequently, Congress can’t regulate and the tax on processors is void

Roosevelt Administration - after Butler

- Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936
 - ◆ Something of a temporary fix
 - ◆ Production reductions based on conservation at the farm level
 - ◆ Payments were made in exchange for farmers taking certain conservation actions – usually not planting crops on highly erodible land
 - ◆ Payments made for taking these conservation actions also resulted in fewer commodities being produced – same outcome as before
 - ◆ Payments to farmers came directly from the Treasury, not from proceeds of the processor tax

- Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937
 - ◆ Covered milk and fresh fruits
 - ◆ Reaffirmed marketing order provisions of 1933 act that were not impacted by the Butler decision

Legacy of Local Committees

- Starting with the AAA of 1933, agricultural programs were administered at the local (usually county) level by committees of local farmers. These committees represented the agricultural establishment of the communities, and were a reflection of the social norms and prejudices of those communities.
 - ◆ Minorities and sharecroppers were rarely appointed to these committees.
 - ◆ In the South, large landowners idled land farmed by sharecroppers, many of whom were African-American
 - ◆ Minority farmer concerns were rarely considered by the local committees

- 1982 report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights – *Decline of Black Farming in America* – documented the systematic discrimination against minority farmers, pointing to limited access to USDA credit programs.

- No action taken to address the discrimination until settlement in *Pigford vs. Glickman* (1999), class action lawsuit, which awarded about \$1 billion in cash relief and debt forgiveness to African-American farmers

Rural Electrification Act of 1936

Lighting up rural America

- 1930 – most towns and cities had reasonably reliable electrical service, but only 10 percent of farms had electrical service

- Electricity on the farm has many uses
 - ◆ Household conveniences
 - ◆ Power to replace human labor
 - ◆ Milking, grain handling, animal feeding, cleaning, water pumping

- Lights, heat and refrigeration can make new enterprises possible

- Grade A dairy
- Modern poultry



Technicians construct electric lines under REA

Civilian Conservation Corps

- Jobs for the unemployed was a major goal of the Roosevelt administration
- The Emergency Conservation Work Act – 1933 (part of the first 100 days)
 - ◆ Established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to employ young men
 - ◆ Administered by the Departments of Labor, War, Interior and Agriculture.
- Paid \$30 per month – required to send much back to families
- Provided skill training and education (many of the recruits were illiterate)
- Provided housing, meals, and clothing
- Between 2.5 and 3 million men participated between 1933 and 1942
 - 200,000 African Americans enrolled– worked in segregated camps
 - ◆ 88,000 Native Americans on tribal lands
 - ◆ 225,000 veterans of World War I

Civilian Conservation Corps

- CCC projects included work on many national and state parks
- CCC also completed many projects aimed at soil and water conservation
 - ◆ Dams
 - ◆ Bridges
 - ◆ Terraces
 - ◆ Cover crops
- Many people who went on to careers in Hollywood, professional sports, government and the military worked on CCC projects
- Not all projects would be considered environmentally sensitive today, but overall, the CCC employed millions and made positive environmental contributions.



Davies Bridge at the Petit Jean State Park in Arkansas. Built by CCC enrollees in 1938. Photo Credit: Steve A. Halbrook

Commodity Credit Corporation

- The CCC is the workhorse of U.S. Agricultural Policy
- Created by Executive Order #6340 in 1933, chartered as a corporation in the State of Delaware, and funded by a \$3 million appropriation by Congress
 - ◆ Buy and sell farm commodities
 - ◆ Lend to farmers
 - ◆ Undertake activities for the purpose of increasing production, stabilizing prices, and ensuring adequate supplies
 - ◆ Facilitate the efficient distribution of agricultural commodities

- Second Executive Order in 1939 transferred ownership of the CCC to the Secretary of Agriculture
- 1948 – CCC Charter Act passed by Congress

Commodity Credit Corporation

- CCC given authority to sell or donate agricultural commodities to government agencies and foreign governments
- CCC is administered by USDA, with the Secretary and other Senate-confirmed officials as its officers
- CCC has no staff of its own—relies on staff from other USDA agencies
- CCC is responsible for funding the key mandatory provisions of every Farm Bill except for crop insurance
- Funded by a \$30 billion borrowing limit that Congress replenishes every year
- CCC has been the administrative mechanism for all farm programs since the 1930s, from conservation programs starting in the 1980's, to the trade mitigation assistance program in the Trump administration and the Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities in the Biden administration

U.S. Agriculture During the War

- Later 1930s – good crop years – large harvests
 - ◆ Government purchased large amounts of many commodities
 - ◆ Began to look at creative ways to dispose of these stocks without market disruptions – early work on an experimental “food stamp” program

- September 1939 – Germany invades Poland
 - ◆ U.S. exports of agricultural commodities surge
 - ◆ All planting restrictions removed – USDA encouraged farmers to produce more
 - ◆ By 1941 – farm income had risen to pre-Depression levels
 - ◆ Government sells “surplus” commodities to moderate food prices

U.S. Agriculture During the War

- After Pearl Harbor (December 1941)
 - ◆ Executive Order 9024 – War Production Board
 - ◆ Emergency Price Control Act of 1942 – Office of Price Administration (OPA)

- Other Changes to Agriculture – happening as the war began
 - ◆ Tractors and mechanical power were replacing draft animals
 - ◆ Hybrid seeds and other biological advances increased yields
 - ◆ Inexpensive fertilizers and pesticides became available
 - ◆ Agricultural productivity increased rapidly – this has significant implications after the war.

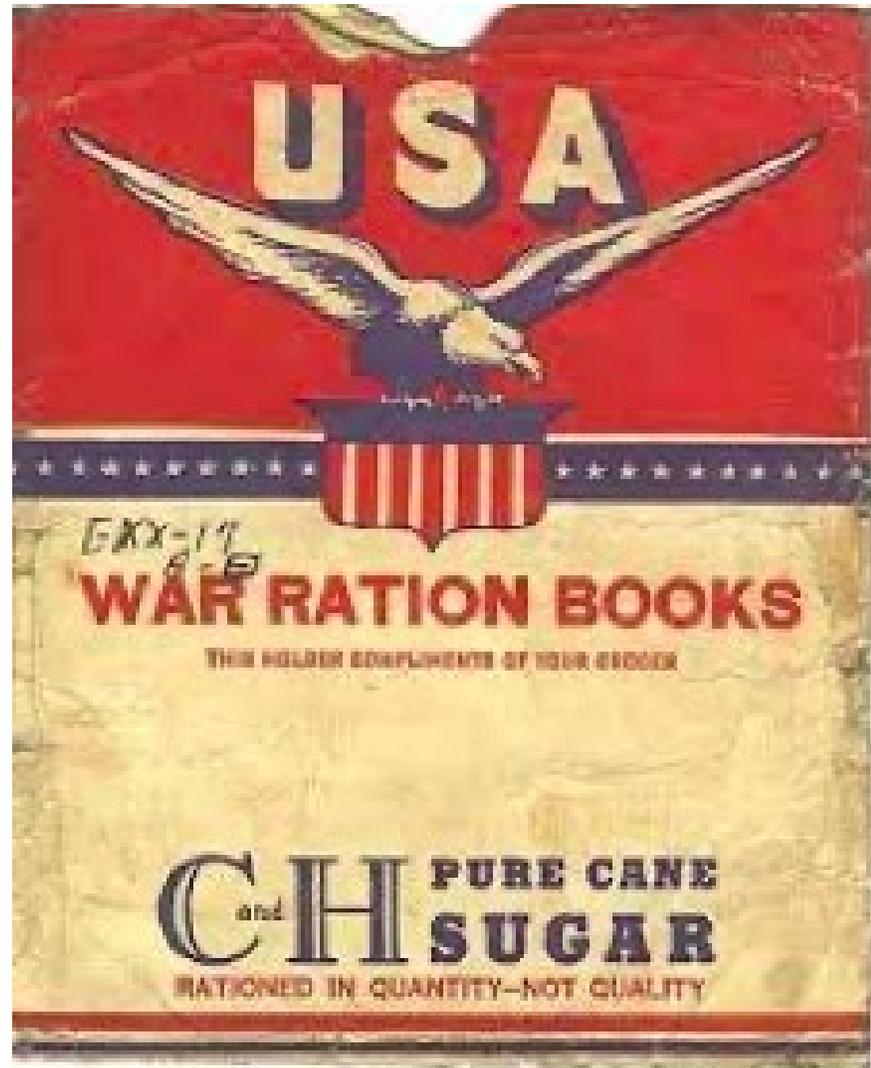
U.S. Agriculture During the War

- Office of Price Administration (OPA) became a critical government agency for agriculture
 - ◆ OPA sold surplus commodities to moderate food prices
 - ◆ Goal – keep food prices less than 110 percent of parity
 - ◆ Some food items were rationed to reduce consumer demand
 - ◆ Steel, gasoline, and rubber were considered strategic commodities
 - ◆ Farmers were given some priority, but gasoline and tires were in short supply
 - ◆ Production of tractors and farm trucks was suspended

- Labor shortage – Many young men left farms for the armed services
 - ◆ Fruit, vegetable and dairy sectors were desperate for labor
 - ◆ Women's Land Army - recruited young women to work in agriculture
 - ◆ By 1943, women were 27 percent of the agricultural labor force
 - ◆ Bracero Program to allow Mexican laborers to work in agriculture

- The labor shortages spurred adoption of labor saving technologies

U.S. Agriculture During the War



The Post War Era

- Support Prices – percent of parity?
- Over Production - Supply Controls
- Early Conservation - Taking marginal land out of production
 - Soil Bank
- Feeding Programs – utilize surplus production
 - Food for Peace
 - School Lunch
 - First Food Stamps

Policy Themes of the Last 50 Years

- International Trade
- Conservation/Environmental Policy
- Crop Insurance
- Energy/Biofuels
- Domestic Nutrition Programs
- Commodity Promotion Programs

How Farm Policy Making has Evolved

- First agricultural policy in U.S. was in the Virginia colony in mid-17th century, farmers required to plant some food crops, not just grow tobacco
- Many of the policies in the 19th century were not explicitly agriculture-focused, but benefitted U.S. agriculture greatly
- Until early 20th Century, all Congressional members and staff were housed in the Capitol proper, so had limited staff to write legislation
- As U.S. agricultural sector became more complicated, so did legislation to govern it
 - First successful farm bill (AAA-1933) was only 25 pages long
 - Agricultural Act of 2018 had 12 titles, was 529 pages long

Crucial Lessons from Agricultural Policy Debates of the Past

- U.S. farm policy is about more than commodity support and crop insurance programs in the farm bill
- Funding agricultural research, extension, and education starting in the 1860's was crucial to creating the U.S. agricultural system as we know it today
- Six out of the last seven farm bills (including the current process) have taken more than a full year to finish
 - For farm bills, it is normal to see policy differences among Ag Committee members based on regional preferences.
 - However, when partisan politics over a set of programs (like nutrition assistance) gets added into the mix, chaos and/or delay often results

Farm Policy Issues of the Future

- There's a plausible case to be made that the farm bill provisions included in the 2025 reconciliation bill, cutting SNAP to fund commodity and crop insurance program increases, may have severed traditional farm bill coalition relationships.
- U.S. farmers hit by stagnant prices and higher input costs in recent years are looking for ways to expand demand and cut their production costs
 - New focus on trade policy
 - Push for year-round access to E15 ethanol blends in all 50 states, more use of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF)
 - Continued concern about access to ag labor workforce
 - Need to continue investing in agricultural research (including biotechnology) to spur productivity, meet expected global demand
- Many of these issues are outside the jurisdiction of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees

Let's Keep the Conversation Going

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