Agriculture and Fort Hays State University

by Helen P. Harris

BUFFALOES AND INDIANS WERE THE principal features of Ellis County and its neighboring counties in the middle of the nineteenth century. Fort Hays military reservation, initially called Fort Fletcher and consisting of seventy-six hundred acres, was established in 1865 to aid those who passed through the region to points west, who were building railroads, and who settled in the area. Two years later, the fort buildings were moved to higher ground and the Union Pacific Railway reached Hays.1

The first attempts at farming in Ellis County were made in 1871 near Ellis; results were not encouraging and only ten or twelve homesteads had been taken by 1872.2 One 1873 homesteader Martin Allen,3 who was born in Ohio and had farmed in Illinois, was impressed with these Kansas plains although the land was much different from that in Illinois and Ohio. At a meeting of the State Horticultural Society in 1878, he proposed: "...we ought to have a testing ground or school of horticulture well out on the plains...As all the state institutions have thus far been located in the eastern third of the state, now let us have a new and useful one in the west..."4 Realizing that the military reservation to protect settlers from Indians soon would no longer be needed, he suggested in 1879 that the Kansas delegation in Congress use all reasonable means to secure the Fort Hays reservation, when abandoned as a military post, to promote agriculture, horticulture, and forestry.5 However, Gen. Phillip Sheridan, believing that it was impossible for white men to live on the Great Plains, had recommended that Fort Hays be abandoned and the region given up permanently to the Indians and the buffalo.6

After the reservation was closed in 1889, a group of army officers formed a syndicate to buy the land at ten dollars an acre and sell it to settlers at a profit. A committee of Hays citizens was successful in checking both the scheme of the army officers and an order of the Department of Interior to open the land for settlement.7 In November 1894, A. R. Taylor, president of the Kansas State Normal School at Emporia, proposed that a state normal school and an agricultural experiment station be established on the federal land if and when it was turned over to the state.8 From the time of Taylor's suggestion the proposed school was referred to as a normal rather than an agricultural school, as had been suggested by Martin Allen, for it was recognized that more and better schools and teachers were a vital need in western Kansas. A resolution to turn the old fort over to Kansas was passed by Congress, and President William McKinley signed it on March 28, 1900. This effectively allotted 4,160 acres for a state institution of learning at Hays, 3,263 acres for an experiment station, and 177 acres for a state park.9

In 1902, believing that agriculture was the principal industry in western Kansas, the Hays City Commercial Club published an enthusiastic evaluation of the new school and the experiment station:

Something which ought to be emphasized here is the advantage of the proximity of the Normal to the Experiment Farm. It will give students in the Normal an opportunity afforded by no other school of its kind in the State. It is a foregone conclusion that the study of agriculture will be introduced into the common schools.

Helen P. Harris received her B.S. and M.S. degrees from Kansas State University and currently resides in suburban Kansas. Interest in present-day education and its relationship to agriculture at Fort Hays State University led to research for this article, a version of which appeared in a 1984 issue of University Forum.

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 4-5.
9. Ibid., 6-9. In 1901 the state, as a result of the federal act, passed a law which located the school on the military reservation, named the school, provided land for a public park, and established an "experimental station": here, as in later state statutes, the station was variously referred to as the experiment or experimental station with the former term most often used. See Revised Statutes of Kansas, 1901 (Topeka: State Printer), Chap. 220, 392.
of the State at no distant date. The coming teacher must have an understanding of the subject...teachers who expect to secure the positions which are most desirable and which pay the best must qualify themselves in this subject.

This farm will afford a gigantic laboratory at the very door of the Normal School. Here the future teacher can see the practical results gained from an analysis of soils; he will learn from observation how soils may be prepared to resist dry climates; he will see how it is possible by selection and cross-breeding of particular varieties or individual plants to secure a plant which combines the better qualities of all.10

On June 23, 1902, the Western Branch State Normal School at Hays opened for its first session with a final enrollment of fifty-seven students for the summer and with William S. Picken as principal.11 The old fort buildings south of Big Creek were dilapidated and Picken, a teacher at the Kansas State Normal School at Emporia before his appointment in February 1902, not only employed others to repair buildings but became personally involved by installing new glass in windows, doing carpentry work, and fighting prairie fires which threatened the buildings.12 Two years later the permanent campus was moved north of Big Creek to its present location adjacent to Hays.13 Picken had many duties—principal, registrar, financial officer, dean, field agent, full-time teacher, and manager of the more than four thousand acres belonging to the school.14 During his eleven years as administrator, the school was primarily a high school. By 1909 two years of college had been added with the first life certificates being granted, and in 1913 four-year degrees were granted.15

During the school’s first years, the teachers of agriculture and natural sciences were generally from the Kansas State Normal School and Kansas State Agricultural College (KSAC). An exception in 1910 was Josiah Main from Illinois State University, recognized as a leader in agricultural pedagogy. In his “Educational Agriculture,” which was published as a bulletin for the Western State Normal School, Main advocated nature study and the school garden in primary and intermediate grades, practical agriculture in upper grades, and agricultural science in high schools.16 Agricultural courses were

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10. Hays City Commercial Club, Bulletin No. 1, Pertaining to Branch State Normal School and Fort Hays Branch Experiment Station, Hays City, Kansas (1902), 22.
11. Forsythe, The First 75 Years, 8-10.
13. Ibid., 58.
then designed for teachers at all levels of public schools. Professor Main's advocacy for agricultural instruction in the schools has been shared by many, and today, as in the early 1900s, the idea continues.17

In 1912 the new agricultural building was dedicated. At the cornerstone laying, Prof. A. M. TenEyck, superintendent of the Fort Hays State Experiment Station, spoke:

This was the first cornerstone in the United States or world where it is proposed to teach agriculture to teachers...the building was designed by Prof. Main...but...the man...who really secured the building, was Mr. Pickin...he had gone to Topeka and secured an appropriation when the experiment station could not get enough money to keep it more than alive.18

A few years later the department of agriculture was moved into the coliseum and the new building became the home economics building. It was later known as the industrial building, and on September 9, 1929, it was named Rarick Hall.19 Since 1928 agriculture classrooms and offices generally have been located in the science building which was named Albertson Hall in 1968.20

17. This continued interest can be exemplified by a WIBW-AM broadcast, July 8, 1983, which reported on a meeting in Topeka of national and state educators who discussed extension of agricultural education to the eighty-seven percent of elementary and secondary students who are not agriculturally oriented.

18. Republican, Hays City, November 4, 1911.
20. Fosythe, The First 75 Years, 41.
Principal Picken and Professor Main were also active in adult education, organizing a three-week course of instruction for "farmers and housekeepers" which was scheduled for the first time in December 1912. Lectures and instruction were given by the local faculty and KSAC staff members. The first year's attendance was small. The short course format proved so worthwhile, however, that it was repeated the next year on a larger scale with an enrollment of 521. In December 1914 a record-breaking first-day attendance of over two thousand was reported with "more than 200 of the pupils over 65 years old." These short courses were listed in college catalogs until 1920 although the last one actually held may have been in 1917.

When the public post-secondary schools were placed under a single administrative board in 1913, Principal Picken resigned, ignoring his friends' advice. William A. Lewis was named the new principal, and a disappointed Professor Main also resigned, having hoped for the top position. Lewis had a farm background. He had been an agriculture professor and head of the department of farm and household economics and director of the state demonstration farm at Kirkville, Missouri. In his new position, he continued to promote agriculture as had his predecessor.

Separation of the Hays and Pittsburg normal schools from the Emporia school was accomplished by 1914. Principal Lewis became President Lewis, guiding the school, which was then known as Fort Hays Kansas Normal School, until his death in 1933. The bill separating the schools stated:

The Emporia school will be known as the Kansas Teachers School and it will devote itself to preparing teachers for general School work.

The Pittsburg one will be known as Kansas Normal College of Industrial Arts and its time devoted to the training of teachers for Manual Training and Domestic Science.

The Ft. Hays State Normal is the KANSAS Agricultural school for Teachers and will devote its time to training teachers in Agriculture and Domestic Science and the general studies needed by teachers in the western half of Kansas.

Publicity came to the young college in August 1915 with a front page article in the Kansas City Journal describing an interview with President Lewis: "To teach

21. One of the students in the first year who enrolled in steam power and blacksmithing was John Tomanek, father of G. W. Tomanek, the seventh president of FHSU (1976- ). G. W. Tomanek, interview with author, February 1984.
22. Republican, December 6, 1913.
26. Ibid., 62.
27. Hays Free Press, February 8, 1913. The school's name cited in this newspaper article does not seem to be the true proper name. Although the name of the school was obviously changed with its separation, no state statute officially changing the name could be found. However, a later statute and history of the school agree that the name was Fort Hays Kansas Normal School after 1918. See Revised Statutes of Kansas, 1923 (Topeka: State Printer), Chap. 229, §23, and Wooster, Fort Hays Kansas State College, 68. In 1923 the name was changed to Kansas State Teachers' College of Hays. In 1921 the school became Fort Hays Kansas State College, and in 1927 it became known as Fort Hays State University. See Revised Statutes of Kansas, 1923, Chap. 229, §23; Revised Statutes of Kansas, 1931 (Topeka: State Printer), Chap. 287, §23; Revised Statutes of Kansas, 1977 (Topeka: State Printer), Chap. 237, §23.
teachers how to teach farmers how to farm. This is one of the special missions of the Fort Hays normal school. President Lewis said: "Our central purpose is agricultural. ... An institution which is to give valuable service to western Kansas can not be the same in construction as a school in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, or even in eastern Kansas."

Referring to the December adult education institute, the article continued:

The short courses which are offered during these three weeks cover agriculture, farm mechanics, animal husbandry, horticulture, care of children, domestic science, domestic art, farm blacksmithing, farm carpentry, farm management, farm advertising, dairying, poultry raising, and gardening, etc.

In spite of zero weather, farmers attend class in open air. Last year one morning with the thermometer 2 below zero and the only protection from the sweep of a western Kansas wind being a wood shack, seventy-one farmers stood for over an hour in a class in sharpening plow shares conducted by Prof. T. M. Wood of the department of blacksmithing.

Truck garden projects for students were begun in 1913 by Prof. W. G. Speer, and in 1915 thirty-nine students planted tomatoes, beans, or cantaloupes in quarter-acre garden plots irrigated by water from Big Creek. The students paid two dollars for the land rent, paid half of the cost for water, and purchased seed cooperatively through their own truck gardening association. Each student planned his own garden, cultivated, harvested, and sometimes hired others. The 1915 season was not a great success because late frost, blight, hailstorms, and exceptionally wet weather cut the expected production. However, the summer of 1916 was a different story. That summer seven young men earned $2,700 from their truck gardens which included potatoes, sweet corn, onions, sweet potatoes, watermelon, celery, cabbage, radishes, lettuce, peas, turnips, spinach and pumpkins, as well as tomatoes, beans, and cantaloupes.

The agricultural program of the fifteen-year-old school received national publicity in the December 22, 1917, issue of the Country Gentleman. Prof. Ernest B. Mathew was the head of the department of agriculture from 1915 to 1918 (he had first taught mathematics in the normal school but in 1915 he took leave to obtain

29. *Hays Daily News*, April 24, 1915; *Western Normal Leader* 16 (April 16, 1913): 6; *Forsythe*, The First 75 Years, 22; *Woofter, Fort Hays Kansas State College*, 77. The truck garden project, begun in 1913, evidently did not take on any organized form until 1915 when students established a truck garden association.

an M.S. in agriculture at the University of Wisconsin. The article described a method Matthew had developed to force vegetable plants to maturity before the hot summer winds came, and also described the gardening techniques taught to students who had been assigned garden plots.30

In 1917 an important agricultural landmark occurred when the U.S. Congress passed the National Vocational Education Act, commonly referred to as the Smith-Hughes Act. In part this document read:

An Act To provide for the promotion of vocational education; to provide for cooperation with the States in the promotion of such education in agriculture and the trades and industries; to provide for cooperation with the States in the preparation of teachers of vocational subjects; and to appropriate money and regulate its expenditure.31

Kansas accepted the benefits of this act, and vocational agriculture was established in many high schools. In 1924, however, the training of vocational agriculture teachers in Kansas was restricted to KSAC, the land-grant college.32 Despite this, a curriculum for agriculture teachers remained in the Fort Hays catalogs until the late 1930s.33

Fred W. Albertson, an early agricultural student, had enrolled first as a correspondence student in 1911, later became a full-time student, and graduated in 1917. Albertson and James E. Rouse were listed as the agriculture teaching staff in catalogs from 1918 to 1936. Albertson, in 1956, became professor of botany, having completed his doctorate in that field, and the chairman of the science group which included agriculture.34 Agriculture courses were now designed for students who would return to the farm or who would have an agriculture-related position in the business world. Forsythe's The First 75 Years describes this change:

In the 1920's the agricultural program assumed a low profile because of laws35 that dictated that agricultural teachers receive their training at Kansas State Agricultural College. The farm persisted, and in the 1930's, there were renters living on the farm and tilling the soil.36 There was much soil loss, and bindweeds taking over the fields. Professors Lester Schmutz, Fred Albertson, David Andrew Riegel, and James Edward Rouse had maintained an agricultural program, and now they set out to rebuild the land. In 1940, the college began to close out the renters, and the last one departed in 1951....

Individuals associated with the college believed during the 1930's that Kansas State Agricultural College considered the Fort Hays farm in some way competitive with the Manhattan, Kansas, facilities.... When William "Bill" Duitsman arrived to take over the Kansas State Experiment Station, a new cooperative attitude prevailed. Older faculty recalled that Duitsman knew there was no competition; the Fort Hays farm was to train students to work family farms.37

33. General Catalog, Kansas State Teachers College of Hays, 1925-1930, and Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1931-1939.
34. Ibid.
35. These were probably either state agency or state statute regulations, not federal regulations, since vocational agriculture teachers in other states receive their training at institutions which are not land-grant colleges; for example, at least three Missouri universities—those at Kirksville, Springfield, and Warrensburg—provide vocational agriculture teacher training. Wallace W. Harris, interview with author, February 1984.
36. Some families had been on the college land for two generations and had even tried to homestead before the reservation was given to the state. D. Andrew Riegel interview, March 1983.
In these companion photographs, students and faculty participating in a 1917 coeducational garden project pose with rakes and hoes in hand.
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years at FHSU</th>
<th>Highest Degree/ School</th>
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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>S. W. Cunningham</td>
<td>1909-1910</td>
<td>B.S. KSAC</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Levis Saboe</td>
<td>1973-1974</td>
<td>Ph.D. Univ. of Minn.</td>
<td>Agronomy</td>
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<td>Whitcomb G. Sper</td>
<td>1913-1915</td>
<td>B.S. KSAC</td>
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<td>Garry Brower</td>
<td>1976-</td>
<td>Ph.D. KSU</td>
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<td>Larry Insley</td>
<td>1976-1980</td>
<td>M.S., KSU</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
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<td>Marion Pearce</td>
<td>1940-1942</td>
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<td>Brent Spaulding</td>
<td>1983-</td>
<td>Ph.D., Iowa St. Univ.</td>
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<td>Herman Rohrs</td>
<td>1941-1942</td>
<td>B.S., KSIC</td>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>Mike B. Gould</td>
<td>1983-</td>
<td>Ph.D., Okla. St. Univ.</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>James R. Wells</td>
<td>1948-1968</td>
<td>M.S., KSIC</td>
<td>Agricultural Education</td>
<td>Timothy L. Ashley</td>
<td>1984-1985</td>
<td>M.S., Univ. of Conn.</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bennie Byler</td>
<td>1968-1970</td>
<td>M.S., Univ. of Ark.</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
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Managing the school’s farmland produced many problems. An early bulletin, published in 1902 by the Hays City Commercial Club, asserted:

The school will be supported in the future in large part from its revenue accruing from the rental of nearly 3,800 acres of fine wheat land included in its share of the Fort Hays reservation—land which, by the way, the state may not sell but must keep as a perpetual support for the school.38

In the 1920s at least six tenants had annual leases for the school’s land—all but two had moved buildings onto their leased acres, and water had to be hauled from town for all except two families.39 Lester Schmutz joined the staff in 1935 as instructor and farm superintendent and made a study, in cooperation with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), of the condition of the leased land. The SCS recommended that some eight hundred badly eroded acres be seeded back to native grass and those with three percent or more slope be terraced. The tenants were asked to cooperate. Some said it would be too expensive and others wanted to continue farming the way they always had. Leasing was gradually phased out and Schmutz

38. Hays City Commercial Club, Bulletin No. 1, 11.  
many years the farm has had one of the top producing dairies in the state. The dairy includes a “Super Cow” (superior in both milk production and reproductive efficiency); in 1981 only about one cow in 625, tested in Kansas, qualified for this designation. Much credit for producing this top dairy goes to Al Graf, now retired, dairyman for forty years.43

Farm superintendents since 1971 include Dr. G. Duane Sharp, Dr. John McGaugh, and Dr. Mike Gould. Dedication of the Riegel Animal Science Laboratory by Gov. Robert Docking occurred during FHSU’s “75th Anniversary Celebration” on June 28, 1977, sixty-five years after the dedication of the first agriculture building, old Rarick Hall. The Kansas legislature and the governor had been made aware of the university farm’s potential importance to the agriculture program of FHSU, western

43. Agriculture Alumni Newsletter, 1 (April 1982).

Fort Hays Branch Experiment Station
OF THE
KANSAS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
KANSAS 68000, HAY DEMONSTRATION FARM

A Practical Field Laboratory for the Fort Hays Kansas Normal School.

DEPARTMENTS:

- Diversified Commercial Farming
- Livestock Breeding and Feeding
- Dry Land Agriculture Investigations
- Practical Dairy Farm, 100 Acres
- General Crop Investigations
- Forestry Nursery Project
- Forage Crop Investigations
- Public Park Development

GROves and DISTRIBUTIONS

Hogs and Cattle, Past Seeds of adapted farm crops, Forest trees, for Kansas planting.

Correspondence is invited upon agricultural problems pertaining to farming under semi-arid conditions. Information available is courteously imparted. The experiment station is twelve years old.

The school’s yearbook of 1914 carried this illustration of the experiment station, and the accompanying text noted that the station had been “working out the problems the farmers of this section have to confront.”

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Fortyb, The First 75 Years, 90.
Kansas, and the entire state. In 1979, as a result of encouragement from state legislators who believed new farm facilities were needed and the farm's general appearance should be improved, a five-year development plan for the university farm was submitted to the university's administrators. Through their efforts in working with members of the legislature, capital improvement funds were appropriated and approval of full state funding for six classified farm workers was obtained. New buildings constructed included a machinery repair shop, a swine farrowing house, and a breeding floor and gestation barn; and other buildings were repaired or remodeled. The new farm image has attracted much favorable attention and resulted in some generous gifts from alumni and friends. But most important, the farm has become an up-to-date classroom and laboratory using the "hands-on" approach for students enrolled in agriculture.

A relatively new livestock endeavor on the university farm is the purebred sheep program. The horse program has been strengthened, and the swine management program has been greatly improved by the addition of modern facilities for breeding and feeding swine. The beef herd was enhanced by the introduction of purebred stock. In 1982 a meat processing laboratory was completed and approved, enabling students to process meat from carcass to retail cuts. With these improved programs and facilities and the increased faculty, student judging teams now participate in contests throughout the United States. In addition, FHSU sponsors livestock judging contests for high school and junior college students.

The agriculture staff was separated from the Department of Biological Science in 1973 during the administration of John Gustad, the sixth president (1969-1976), and Dr. Wallace W. Harris was named chairman of the new department. At the beginning of the 1983-1984 school year, the staff consisted of six professors with doctorate degrees in different agricultural specialties. Although FHSU is known as the "University of Western Kansas," the agricultural program has spread farther since agriculture became a separate department, as evidenced by the increased number of international students. There were 210 agriculture majors in the 1983 fall semester with an all-time high enrollment of 276 majors in 1981. Agriculture graduates, about fifty each year, are found throughout the world, but the majority remain in Kansas.

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44. G. W. Tomanek interview, February 1984.
45. Agriculture Alumni Newsletter, 1 (October 1982).
46. Ibid., 2 (October 1983).
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 1 (April 1982).

William A. Lewis took over leadership of the school in 1913 and served until his death in 1933.

In cooperation with the School of Business, the Department of Agriculture developed an agribusiness curriculum, the only four-year program in Kansas, which has proved very attractive to both students and prospective employers. High technology also has not been ignored for the microcomputer is an important instructional tool in many of the agriculture courses.

A vocational agriculture program for teachers was planned with the cooperation of Kansas State University and was approved to begin in 1982. However, selection of a professor "to teach the teachers how to teach farmers how to farm" was delayed because of budget cuts.
The university farm has kept pace with innovations in farming. Pictured here is the farm's wheat harvest in 1973.

When the position is restored, the special mission envisioned by President Lewis in 1915 will again be part of the agriculture program.51

Delta Tau Alpha, a national honor society for outstanding agriculture students at non-land grant colleges, has had an active chapter on the Fort Hays campus since 1959. Their first faculty adviser, Prof. James Wells, was the program chairman in 1963 for the ninth annual conference, which was held in Hays, of the National Association of College Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA); the NACTA group was instrumental in establishing the honor society. The university also served as host for the 1981 NACTA judging contest which drew contestants from all sections of the United States. There is also a student chapter of the Soil Conservation Society of America on campus. Many students are active in Block and Bridle and the Rodeo Club and participate in collegiate rodeos in Hays and on other campuses.52

Work opportunities and scholarships now help defray costs for students who desire to study agriculture at FHSU. Available work includes work-study jobs, allowing students to work on campus or on the university farm and to earn an amount determined by proven need, and part-time jobs that are available at the university farm and at various off-campus establishments. Scholarships are made available to present and potential agriculture students by Fort Hays alumni and other individuals, agribusiness firms, and various organizations interested in the agriculture program at FHSU. Before receiving a scholarship, however, a student must demonstrate academic performance and/or a need.53

Progress in realizing the dreams and hopes of the early promoters of agricultural education at FHSU has been made as indicated by the improved facilities, the larger enrollment of students in up-to-date courses and curriculum, the added faculty, and the wider experiences now available to students who wish to pursue a course of study in agriculture.

52. Agriculture Alumni Newsletter, I (April 1982).
53. Ibid., 9 (April 1984).