It’s up to you to keep that Army marching!

With overalls for uniforms, tractors for weapons, and food for bullets, the American farmer became a major “fighting force” on the home front. Illustration from Capper’s Farmer, September 1942. Capper’s Farmer was a monthly magazine addressing agricultural issues, published by Capper Publications, Topeka, Kansas, from 1919 to 1980.
“Food Will Win the War and Write the Peace”

The Federal Government and Kansas Farmers During World War II

by Michael J. Grant

During the Second World War, the American farmer made incredible increases in production that allowed the United States to supply its home markets, its armed forces, and its overseas allies. Kansas farmers can be proud of the swelling harvests that fed a world at war. One aspect that often is forgotten, however, is the infighting and controversy that accompanied these vast yields. The administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected officials, government farm officials, and farm group representatives each worked to coax maximum production out of Kansas farmers. In reply, the Kansas farm sector emerged from years of drought and economic depression to reclaim its role as a colossus of agricultural output. However, this was not accomplished without major disputes over profits, productivity, and the government's role in the countryside. Kansas farmers supported government when commodity markets were flat; but when agricultural markets soared in the early 1940s, Kansas farmers demanded the right to increase their yields without federal impediments.

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The conflict between agricultural controls and demands for unfettered opportunity suggests the strength of the entrepreneurial spirit and the profit motive in American life; these sometimes conflicted with the needs of wartime America.

In December 1943, fourteen years after the Great Depression began, President Roosevelt declared that his social and economic reforms no longer were needed to induce a national economic recovery. After two years of war, “Dr. New Deal” was dead, he declared. In his place came “Dr. Win-the-War.” In a strong sense, his statement was long overdue. Roosevelt’s administration had not sponsored a major reform since the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Nevertheless, powerful voices in the state of Kansas that had long since come to oppose various New Deal measures welcomed this official obituary.

Many people from the traditionally Republican state actually accepted the early New Deal. The ideological journey of Senator Arthur Capper of Topeka serves as an example of Kansas support for the New Deal. Capper, a journalist by training, served as governor of Kansas during World War I and as senator from 1919 to 1949. Capper was the long-respected elder statesman of the Sunflower State. He managed to follow closely the opinions of the farmers of his state through constant contact during visits home. He also influenced state farm opinion through his ownership of the Topeka Daily Capital newspaper and the Kansas Farmer and Capper’s Farmer magazines.

During the early New Deal years, between 1933 and 1936, Capper and other western progressive Republicans found common cause with the Roosevelt administration. Capper and his fellow progressive Republican senators came from similar backgrounds. They grew up in small towns in the rural West and were suspicious of eastern financial interests as well as large cities. Initially, Capper admired Roosevelt’s dynamic measures to relieve the social and economic troubles of America’s farmers. During the first one hundred days of the Roosevelt administration, the United States Congress passed a bewildering number of bills. One of these bills had a decisive impact on the Kansas countryside. As a result of legislation, on May 12, 1933, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration


(AAA) was established. The goal of the AAA was to cut the surplus of crops and livestock and increase farmers’ purchasing power. Farmers who agreed to take part in the program would receive a payment for cutting back on their production of certain commodities. Eventually, it was hoped, the vast stocks of farm produce would shrink, then market prices would rise, and the need for government supports would disappear. In Kansas, the most important of these commodities were wheat, corn, and hogs. The AAA raised the money for these payments through a tax on food processors.3

During the summer of 1933 Capper wrote approvingly of the first months of hectic legislation. The new Democratic-led Congress was, he wrote, “a great inspiration; [it] renew[s] one’s faith in the solid foundation on which this government rests.” Capper praised the many New Deal benefits coming to Kansans through crop benefits for wheat growers and public work projects. He lauded mortgage relief programs and the attempts to restore the farmers’ purchasing power. Although a Republican, Capper wrote he had “no hesitancy . . . in appealing to all loyal Kansans to support President Roosevelt and his program, [and] give him and it a fair chance to succeed.”4

Midway through Roosevelt’s second term, however, Capper had become disenchanted, or had followed his constituents’ disenchantment, and began criticizing the New Deal. Senator Capper and many of his fellow Kansans had come to fear the growing power of the presidency. On one front, Roosevelt appeared to desire control over the Supreme Court through his “court packing” scheme. He also seemed to be consolidating his power over the government’s administration through the Executive Reorganization Act of 1933. Finally, many Americans feared the combination of a growing federal debt and the powerful federal bureaucracy under the New Deal that was unable to end the economic slump that had plagued the country since 1929.5

Many Kansas farm representatives also were upset with the Roosevelt administration’s commodities program. In January 1936 the United States Supreme Court declared the original Agricultural Adjustment Administration unconstitutional. Congress rushed through the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act one month later. Under this stopgap measure, farmers could lease to the federal government land they had previously used for soil-depleting crops. Unfortunately, many farmers at this time kept their lands out of the program and in production. Also, farmers complained that conservation payments were so low and the program so limited they could not afford to put their land in reserve.6 The result was a continued surplus of wheat and corn.

Two years later Congress replaced this program with the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938. The second AAA retained the conservation measures of the stopgap bill and added the principle of the “ever-normal granary.” Under the second AAA, the secretary of agriculture could set compulsory production quotas on farm commodities after two-thirds of the affected farmers agreed to them in referenda elections. Afterward, the federal government through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) supported farm prices by holding certain storable commodities of cooperating farmers as collateral for nonrecourse loans. The loan rate was tied to the “parity price” formula, which had been devised to ensure that farm products would receive the same price as an index of nonfarm goods.7

Ideally, this program would benefit the farmer and the consumer. Farmers could count on a steady income when agricultural prices were down. They would repay their loans when the surplus was eliminated and commodity prices rose. If farm prices con-

continued to fall, the CCC bore the loss. On the other hand, with the CCC holding the surplus commodities, urban consumers could count on an affordable supply of food. In addition, the second AAA introduced the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, which allowed wheat growers to pay for crop insurance in wheat. This set in place the standard for the U.S. farm program during the Second World War until 1996.

In theory, farmers accepted the second AAA. They overwhelmingly approved the mandatory market quotas, and many Kansas wheat growers took part in the crop insurance program. Yet the farm program, cosponsored by Kansas Senator George S. McGill, eventually became unpopular for two reasons. First, the second AAA failed to cut the mounting grain surpluses of the late 1930s. While farmers were reducing their wheat acreage, they found ways to increase their yields. Second, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) used this program to discourage wheat production by paying off the loans at the legal minimum rate of sixty cents a bushel. Kansas farmers therefore were left with less acreage to farm and lower income. McGill, a Democrat, found his opponent, Clyde M. Reed, using his association with the unpopular farm bill against him. Reed swept McGill out of office during the senatorial race of 1938.

The year 1938 witnessed further opposition to the New Deal by leading Kansans. Not only was the second AAA attracting criticism, but the Roosevelt administration seemed to many to be too powerful and eager for war. In the fall of 1938 Senator Capper saw the threat of authoritarian regimes taking over the world. In such an environment, Capper wrote, the dilemma of the world’s democracies was to “obtain security and a workably equitable distribution of income, without crushing the liberty and obliterating the initiative of the individual.” The senator feared the specter of “regimentation” that had engulfed the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy would spread its shadow over America through the New Deal. During the early years of the New Deal, Capper said, Kansans had accepted the new restrictions when they were in the “depths of depression [and] despair.” Yet Capper’s reaction to the New Deal farm policy changed as the major nations of the world became engulfed in armed conflict. He voiced his concerns and equated war expenditures with the centralization of the government’s control over farms. During the early 1940s the United States increased its defense spending to face a world at war. Senator Capper was not convinced of the need for America’s entry into the world conflagration. He continued to criticize the “riotous spending” for defense he believed would only serve to draw his country into war. Capper also alleged that the USDA’s conservation and crop payments were going to larger farms rather than to the “family unit farm” that embodied Kansas’s pioneer heritage.

An experienced politician such as Senator Capper kept himself in line with his state’s rural voters, yet he and others listening to agriculture leaders heard a mixed bag of opinions regarding the New Deal. Some Kansas farm leaders continually criticized the new agricultural programs. For example, Carl C. Cogswell, the head of the conservative Kansas Grange, expressed his reservations about the New Deal from the beginning of the reforms. With a stable membership of seven thousand farm families in Kansas during the 1930s, the Grange carried some weight. In 1934 Cogswell wrote that he and other Grange members hoped that government involvement in farm planning would be only a “temporary program.” He stated that the Kansas Grange as a whole did not support New Deal policy that would take “control of our agricultural production from the producers.” Four years later Cogswell reaffirmed his opposition to the New Deal farm program which, he wrote, was unsound.

and placed the agricultural sector at a disadvantage compared with other industries.\(^\text{12}\)

However, while some outright opposition to the domestic New Deal agricultural program existed on the eve of America's entry into World War II, many Kansas farmers supported it. When there was criticism, much of it was aimed at the administration or funding for farm programs rather than at the programs themselves. In December 1939 Senator Cap-

![BATTLE STATION!](image)

Kansas farmers showed their patriotism with hard work and support for the armed forces. Yet often they were unenthusiastic toward the wartime agricultural program. Illustration from Capper's Farmer, June 1942.

per, Representative Clifford R. Hope of Garden City, who chaired the Republican Farm Study Committee, and three other Kansas Republican congressmen—Thomas D. Winter, Frank Carlson, and Edward H. Rees—met in Hutchinson to hear the opinions of Kansas farmers. Nearly all the farmers present appeared to oppose the Roosevelt administration's reciprocal trade program and its impact on wheat growers.\(^\text{13}\) Some farmers called for cooperative and local administration of commodity programs. Others, such as the head of the Kansas Farm Bureau, called for an alternate method of financing agricultural price supports.\(^\text{14}\)

Still, many Kansas farmers praised the New Deal, particularly its farm price support and conservation program. J.J. Zimmerman, who had farmed at Belle Plain for fifty years, called the AAA "better than anything we have had yet" and supported controlled production. L.E. Dubbs of western Kansas claimed, "If it were not for the Triple-A, there wouldn't be any farmers left on the high plains. . . . The reason the AAA appeals to us out there is because it assures us permanence. . . . Let's be frank—it's the checks that appeal to us." Will J. Miller, secretary of the Kansas Livestock Association, also supported continuing the New Deal farm programs. The farm and ranch sector could not endure any cuts at present, he said. "But," he added hopefully, "two good years of moisture and the Kansas farmer would not need any relief at all."\(^\text{15}\)

Two years did bring a change, but certainly not one that most Kansas farmers could have predicted. In December 1941 the state's farmers found their nation at war—and still oriented to a farm life in a depressed economy. Intense

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13. Under the Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act of 1934 the president could make bilateral trade agreements with other nations to increase or reduce tariffs. The president could make this agreement without specific congressional approval. Kansas wheat growers were opposed to a trade agreement with countries such as Argentina because they feared foreign grain flooding American markets.


drought and crop failures throughout the 1930s left many Kansas farmers ill-prepared to meet the needs of a wartime economy. For example, wheat growers in central Kansas had suffered through a drought beginning in January 1933 that did not end until October 1940. Many Kansas farmers were anxious about the war’s impact on the agricultural markets. Would America’s full entry into war bring prosperity or upheaval to the Plains countryside? No one was certain.

A day after the United States officially declared war on the Empire of Japan, C.C. Cogswell spoke at the annual session of the Kansas State Grange. “Food will probably be the determining factor in the winning of the war,” he predicted. Cogswell voiced his continued opposition to the New Deal’s controlled production plans. “The Grange has never favored the philosophy of scarcity. . . . We have always believed that prosperity comes through abundance.” Yet Cogswell was leery of the prospect of crop overproduction and a resulting slump in farm prices as had occurred after World War I. As a safeguard, Cogswell called for protection from the “ruinous effects of surpluses.” Therefore, while farm leaders like Cogswell wanted government price supports, they opposed production controls. This solution, however, ignored the already huge stocks of surplus grain filling America’s granaries.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the nation’s primary agricultural problems remained from the Great Depression: underemployment and substandard living conditions in the countryside, soil erosion, low commodity prices, and huge produce surpluses. Consequently, between the spring of 1940 and Pearl Harbor, while much of the nation’s indus-


17. “Grangers Pledge All to the U.S.,” Emporia Gazette, December 9, 1941.
try converted to a war economy, America’s agricultural policies remained much the same. On the other hand, through its huge commodities surpluses, the country was well equipped to supply its needs. 18

During the early years of the war, Congress struggled over whether to allow agricultural production to rise with farm prices or to maintain control of both prices and production. In May 1941 Congress guaranteed that farmers raising wheat, corn, and other key commodities would receive at least 85 percent of parity for the yields. In January 1942 Congress passed the Emergency Price Control Act to restrain inflation in food prices. The act set a ceiling of farm commodities at 110 percent of parity. Congress also encouraged the American farmer to raise more livestock, vegetables, and oil-bearing crops such as peanuts and soybeans. The Roosevelt administration’s wartime farm policy was to ensure increased production of agricultural commodities in short supply and to use the vast reserves of surplus wheat and corn to meet market needs. A fundamental concern was to keep commodity prices stable for urban consumers. 19

The American farmer responded to the call to feed a world at war. With the aid of bumper harvests, most Americans increased their food consumption and improved their nutrition between 1941 and 1945. This was rare indeed for a nation at war. 20 The fields and pastures of Kansas helped stock the American larder through an explosive increase in agricultural production during this time. Despite having fifteen thousand fewer farms in 1945 than at the beginning of the decade, Kansas farmers were able to enlarge the cropland they tilled by five million acres—a 22 percent expansion. In five years Kansas farmers boosted their annual winter wheat harvest by a mammoth seventy-one million bushels and their harvest of corn by sixty-one million bushels. Kansas stockmen augmented their sales of both cattle and hogs by two-thirds between 1940 and 1945. 21 In addition to the enlarged acreage, these increases came from farmers’ use of pesticides, insecticides, fertilizer, hybrid seeds, and power machinery. 22

Despite these productive gains and the popular notion of an America united in war, the actual environment in Kansas was one ill-at-ease with the old New Deal and the new demands of warfare. Kansas farmers showed their patriotism with hard work and support for servicemen and women. Yet farmers in the state often were unenthusiastic toward the wartime agricultural program. Herbert Drake, farmer, educator, and unsuccessful Democratic candidate for the second congressional district of Kansas, provides a window on the political environment in 1942. Republican Ulysses Guyer trounced the Democrat by 20 percent of the vote during the election. Drake blamed the poor showing of Kansas Democrats on opposition to the New Deal and the administration of the war effort. The Kansas farmer had become disenchanted with Roosevelt’s efforts at agricultural reform and recovery. Drake speculated:

The New Deal philosophy seems to be proving to be a philosophy of catastrophe. It goes well when people are in want. When the crisis passes and confidence returns, everyone wants to be on his own to produce and spend as he pleases. The farmer feels he can get good prices for everything he can grow and wants to grow it and not ask anyone... We are all going to be rugged individualists again... There will be a great hue and cry to scrap all New Deal reforms. The farmer will want to plant without restrictions. 23

Drake believed that many Kansans felt America merely had been drawn into the war by provoking

Germany. Rather than a united home front for the successful prosecution of the war, he perceived a sense of isolationism, betrayal, and hostility for home-front restrictions and price controls among Kansans. Drake wrote, "We are not emotionally in this war...the whole war set-up is simply leaving a bad taste in everyone's mouth and the only thing to do was to swat those whose hands were on the helm," who were the Democrats.24

Accordingly, Kansas farmers and their spokespersons vented their frustrations for the limitations of the American farm policy. In particular they were distressed over wartime price controls and supports, inflation, and labor and machinery shortages. Despite the obvious importance of food production in the war effort, farmers believed they had not received the assistance they required or the profits they had earned. This was partly because the American economy during the Second World War was not one free to react to the forces of supply and demand. Rather, the federal government controlled key factors in agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation such as prices, supplies, wages, and working conditions. For the nation at large, the fruits of the "war prosperity" were elusive. Many Americans were not truly out of the Great Depression until the postwar economic recovery. Therefore, the war years were a traumatic time when the American economy shifted from a depression economy to a planned economy to a market economy.25 This was especially so for Kansas, where farmers already were disturbed by the New Deal regulations during times of economic slump. Now farmers were frustrated by what they perceived as unnecessary restrictions during the potentially prosperous war years.

The most important development for the Kansas farmer was the combination of price controls and supports implemented during the war. Kansans had seen more than a decade of economic distress, duststorms, and voluntary curtailments of agricultural production. Many Kansas farmers had endured years of drought, disappointment, government regulation, and life below the poverty line. The countryside finally sensed the sweet smell of profits for their crops and livestock with the return of rains and better farm markets. When both moisture and better prices returned in the early 1940s, farmers rejoiced any impediments keeping them from finally making a profit from their land. This partly explains the continual controversy over farm price supports and controls during the war. Under the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Administration, farmers had restricted their acreage to cut back their production, decrease surpluses and soil erosion, and increase farm prices. This was intended to place the farm sector in parity with the industrial sector. Yet a decade of these programs had little impact on long-term agricultural trends. During the 1930s farm mechanization and improvements in crop yields led to increased production, despite the goals of the AAA. So farmers were left with a tremendous potential for production; the food demands of a global war could possibly provide an outlet.

The wartime domestic economy demanded rigid control over production and prices, with unpredictable results for the parity concept. But the farm sector and congressional representatives from farm districts opposed any price ceilings on agricultural goods until they had reached parity with industry. Farm groups and farm state senators and representatives were in a waiting game to see how high commodity prices could rise before accepting limitations on their profits. However, so great were grain surpluses that they depressed farm prices through 1942. So while global demand reduced stockpiles of American wheat and corn during the war, the country still held hundreds of millions of bushels of grain in reserve.26 Only after President Roosevelt issued his "hold the line" proclamation

24. Ibid.
against higher prices in April 1943 did the farm sector stop holding out for higher market prices. And only in 1944 did Congress remove the AAA controls on production. This frustrated many Kansas farmers who truly believed that prosperity came through the abundance of their harvests. In response, during the erratic war years Kansas farmers criticized the federal government when the grain-swollen markets did not offer them more rewards.

The federal government encouraged women to work on farms to alleviate labor shortages. Illustration from Capper’s Farmer, October 1942.

To a great extent Kansas farmers had little to protest in the American home-front economy. In October 1942 Congress passed the Steagall Amendment, which amended the Emergency Price Control Act and guaranteed government price supports to American farmers for two years after the war. This conceivably gave them some security if they chose to increase production during and after the war. By early 1942 Congress had placed price supports on many commodities so that their producers would reap at least 110 percent of parity. However, Kansas farmers seldom needed these supports. Farmers in the Corn Belt saw an increase of 300 percent in their net farm income between 1939 and 1945. Wheat growers of the southern Great Plains, who struggled through the drought-stricken Thirties, expanded their annual net income from three hundred to sixty-five hundred dollars—a jump of 2,000 percent during the same period. 29

So why were Kansas farmers uneasy during these times of bountiful rains and higher farm prices after 1943? First, they were afraid that despite their rising income, they were not procuring as much as the urban industrial sector. One complaint concerned the method of supporting commodity prices. The federal government itself subsidized the increase in farm

27. Wilcox, The Farmer in the Second World War, 8, 11, 19, 45, 125.
prices to decrease inflationary pressures on the American economy. Senator Capper criticized this measure as a consumer subsidy. Like other representatives of farm interests, Capper worried that in postwar America consumers would come to see increased farm prices as a governmental policy rather than the results of the market.  

In addition, the timing of price controls and inflation made Kansas ranchers and farmers angry at the Roosevelt administration. For example, Wabaunsee County Democratic Chairman Lawrence Anderson reported that his region’s cattlemen were angry at federal officials for unpredictable pricing policies.

During the spring of 1943, Anderson reported, federal officials urged Flint Hills ranchers to enlarge their herds. “Food would win the war,” clamored the USDA. In response, local cattlemen increased their herds. In the fall, however, the Office of Price Administration rolled back cattle prices. This drop, combined with inflated prices for feed and labor, wiped out ranchers’ profit margins. This left the region with, in Anderson’s words, “a bad situation.”

While most agrarians were prospering during the war, many farmers and farm organizations feared that “another farm depression will follow in the wake of the war.” Illustration from Capper’s Farmer, June 1944.

The cost of labor problem received much notice in the farm press. It is not hard to see where farm labor—both family and paid workers—was going. The increase in construction and manufacturing for the military and war-related industries cried out for


31. Lawrence Anderson to Frank Walker, November 29, 1943; box 1157, 1943 Political Situation by States subseries, DNC Papers.
more labor. Farm men and women heeded the call. One magnet for Kansas farm labor was the Cessna airplane plant in Wichita, which pulled 80 percent of its work force from farms in 1942. Workers started at sixty cents an hour, and within a year's time could earn ninety-five cents an hour. Patriotism, weekly paychecks of forty dollars, and the freedom and modern conveniences of city life drew many Kansans from the countryside to war plants.\(^2\)

It was not only the lure of jobs in defense plants that took sons, fathers, and hired hands off the farm. Before U.S. entry into the Second World War, the federal government began conscripting men. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and until the fall of 1943, the federal government increased the number of men eligible for the draft so that by October 1943 men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five not working for essential sectors of the war economy could be conscripted. By the millions, farm owners, tenants, and workers left the fields and farm yards to put on uniforms. The rapid readjustment to a war economy with fewer farm workers confined farmers. Between the fall of 1942 and the first half of 1943, commercial farmers found themselves shifting from a labor surplus to a labor shortage. This dearth of experienced farm workers drove up wages during the war, and Plains farmers found themselves paying their hired hands four times their prewar wages.\(^3\)

The federal government, however, through various means, did help supply midwestern farmers with hired hands. Twenty-two percent of the farmers in the west north-central states received a draft deferment—higher than the national rate of 15 percent. Draft boards required these deferred men to work full time, and if they left agriculture or shifted to smaller farms, they could be inducted.\(^4\) In addition, the federal government encouraged women to work in the fields and farmyards to alleviate labor shortages. In Kansas and elsewhere in the Plains states where agriculture was highly mechanized, the "Women’s Land Army" was composed mainly of women with farm backgrounds.\(^5\)

Kansas farmers were squeezed between demands for increased production on one hand and labor and machinery shortages and expensive operating costs on the other. Regional scarcities of farm labor meant older farmers in particular found it difficult to secure enough help. Many had to rent their land, reduce their operations, or leave farming completely. In Topeka in late 1942 one experienced dairy farmer who could not find enough help sold his operation and went to work at a munitions plant forty miles away.\(^6\) During the spring of 1943 Capper's Farmer reported that more than half of Kansas farms were short of labor. Western Kansas stockraisers lost the chance to restore previously parched acreage to production due to the scarcity of hired hands. Capper's asserted that most farmers were skeptical of government plans to recruit labor battalions to fill in the labor shortages.\(^7\)

Kansas and Kansas farmers were profiting from improved agricultural markets during the war. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Kansans regardless of party pledged their cooperation with President Roosevelt in the war effort. However, the strain of increasing yields within a controlled farm economy, which was short on machinery and labor, unraveled this unity. Directly after Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war, Kansans such as Arthur Capper were willing to make sacrifices for the good of the war effort. In January 1942 Capper wrote:

For the duration of the war the rights and privileges of the individual must be surrendered, when necessary, for the good of all...\(^8\)

34. Wilcox, The Farmer in the Second World War, 83, 86, 89.
36. "Headed for Hunger?" Capper's Farmer 53 (December 1942): 11. Although not mentioned by name, the munitions plant in question undoubtedly was the Sunflower Plant near Hesston, Kansas.
Individual and corporate enterprises will be under Governmental regulation and control so that our major effort may be directed toward winning the war.\textsuperscript{38}

However, within the year Capper’s own Republican Party rallied against the Democrats’ wartime administration. In President Roosevelt’s programs Kansas Republicans perceived threats to local self-government and runaway spending unrelated to the war effort. Finally, the party rallied against federal efforts under the New Deal “to centralize all government authority in the bureaucratic control of the Federal Government.” Kansas Republicans urged, “We must not establish totalitarianism at home while fighting it abroad.”\textsuperscript{39}

One could easily dismiss this as campaign rhetoric. After all, the Republican Party out of power was seeking to attract votes while remaining loyal to the war effort. However, grassroots opposition to the New Deal and the Roosevelt administration’s farm policies had heightened after 1943. Even the Democratic Party admitted that it had alienated the nation’s farm vote. While most American farmers were prospering during the war, a report from the Democratic National Committee concluded that this only supported their “natural conservatism.” American farmers were “preoccupied with hard work, paying off debts, [and] getting ready to weather a depression they think is coming within two years after the war.” Most farmers, according to the report, expected some farm program to continue even when the Democrats left power. Yet farmers were upset over the price supports, and they believed that the processing “middleman” and labor were making more than their fair share of profits. Many farmers appeared to oppose any advance of a domestic New Deal of reforms. Likewise, according to the report, the Republicans could make political gains by playing on their fears that “the New Deal is bent on saving the world—that it wants to be a meddlesome Santa Claus.”\textsuperscript{40}

A review of Kansas public opinion illustrates that the Roosevelt administration also had alienated many nonagrian Kansans. R.L. Helvering, a Marysville attorney, wrote that the Republican Party would be able to carry the state during the 1944 election without any trouble. Helvering reported that in Marshall County, as well as across the state, “people are very much off the so-called New Deal.” He continued, “They do not object to accepting all benefits but certainly are antagonistic as to any curtailment or infringement of their personal rights.”\textsuperscript{41} These comments suggest that rural Kansas was chomping at the bit during the war, and farmers were pressuring their elected officials for a change. One farm group in Geary County petitioned Kansas Congressman Edward Rees to end crop restrictions and subsidies. The farmers opposed AAA controls because of the “regimentation, restriction, penalization, and oppression” under the program. The petition went on to criticize the “unnecessary centralization of government” that “undermines democracy and threatens the very foundation of our Nation.” Finally, the Geary County farmers promoted the power of the legislative branch in an obvious swipe at the Roosevelt administration.\textsuperscript{42}

Senator Capper found a restless spirit at his annual farmers’ forum in September 1943. Of the one thousand farmers attending the meeting, many expressed their impatience with the AAA, farm labor shortages, and the administration of the war. In addition, A.B. Armstrong of Smith County criticized federal agricultural efficiency experts. “Do you know what an efficiency expert is?” he asked. “He is the one who can not make a living himself, but wants to be paid a salary for telling us rugged individualists how to make a living.” Kansas farmers, such as those at the forum, equated the struggle to run their operations without controls with America’s struggle against the Axis powers. For example, Victor Hawk-

\textsuperscript{39} Official Platform, 1942, Republican Party of Kansas, 4.
\textsuperscript{40} “Prospectus for the National Democratic Farm Campaign, 1944,” Miscellaneous Papers file, 1932–1948, DNC Papers.

\textsuperscript{41} R.L. Helvering to Frank Walker, November 24, 1943, Kansas file, 1943 Political Situation by States, ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Appendix to the Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 1st sess., 89, pt. 10: A2409.
inson of Riley County repeated a prevalent fear by announcing, “While our boys are fighting for freedom across the seas, it is our duty to keep farming a free institution at home.”

The Farm Bureau was a natural ally to opponents of the New Deal during wartime. Created in Chicago in 1919, it was the most influential farm organization in America. Between 1935 and 1945 the Kansas Farm Bureau grew in membership from ninety-eight hun-

dred to thirty-two thousand farm families. Historically, the Farm Bureau opposed government regulation of the farm economy and restrictions on crop production. It proposed healthy foreign and domestic markets as the solution for the agricultural problems. During the Second World War the Farm Bureau, like Senator Capper, opposed the Roosevelt administration’s use of federal subsidies to bolster crop receipts. Instead, the organization favored allowing the commodity market to increase farm prices. Furthermore, the Farm Bureau was concerned that Roosevelt was favoring urban consumers and labor through his wartime food policy. The Bureau also feared the USDA’s centralization, and since county farm agents tended to support the Farm Bureau, it dreaded the prospect of local USDA-sponsored land planning committees forming a competing farm organization.

The Farm Bureau also opposed government measures that might reduce farmers’ control over their hired hands and increase farmers’ labor expenses. In 1943 Congress moved the War Manpower Commission to the Department of Agriculture where the Farm Bureau could influence wartime farm policy on agricultural labor. Consequently, under the USDA the commission was prohibited from setting farm workers’ wages, hours, or housing standards, and from encouraging collective


bargaining among farmers. Another example of the Farm Bureau's successful opposition to New Deal-style reforms came toward the end of the war. In 1944, in his Economic Bill of Rights, President Roosevelt spoke of his hope that the New Deal would continue after the war was won. In opposition, members of the Kansas Farm Bureau spoke vociferously against the extension of social programs, such as the Wagner-Murray-Dingle bill, into the field and farm-

Although production boomed during the war, farmers were concerned about the future and doubted the federal government's commitment to equitable farm price supports once peace was restored. Illustration from Capper's Farmer, September 1943.

yard. If enacted, the bill would have required farmer employers to contribute to social security benefits for their agricultural workers.

Mrs. Ralph Colman spoke to fellow Kansas Farm Bureau members at their Home and Community Conference in 1945 on the bill. Although she lauded certain principles of social security, Mrs. Colman opposed efforts to expand the coverage to include farm workers and criticized the system generally for its creation of "artificial jobs," "subsidies," and "just plain doles." She protested a potentially expensive social security system for farmers that would spread more government involvement into rural America. The government, she said, should only provide a safety net for farmers through price floors, trade agreements, crop insurance, and lending institutions. "We want only the right to help ourselves," she said. "Give us markets and prices, parity prices and . . . we shall, by hard work and management, attain our own social security." In a similar fashion, Kansas Farm Bureau members opposed adding health insurance to the social security program. Mrs. Virgil Morton stated that "a compulsory medical program is abhorrent to farm people." She proposed cooperative medical institutions instead.

O n May 4, 1945, the United States Department of War announced that after Germany surrendered, two million servicemen would be discharged from the army. Two days later the USDA reported that Europe would have to receive one million tons of food per month to feed its war-ravaged population for the near future. The news of returning farm men and women as well as heavy demand for American produce should have cheered American farmers. Yet, just as during the early years of the war, American farmers were concerned about the

47. Polenberg, War and Society, 87.
future. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) found the countryside ill at ease in 1944, even with the anticipated Allied victories in Europe and in the Pacific. Farmers, according to the DNC report, were concerned with a postwar land boom like the one following the First World War. They also doubted the federal government’s commitment to equitable farm price supports when they proved unstable during the war. Finally, the report said, most farmers were convinced that “as sure as Monday follows Sunday another farm depression will follow in the wake of the war.”

We have seen a Kansas countryside troubled with its role during the Second World War. Kansas farmers and their representatives may have accepted government agricultural subsidies during the 1930s. However, by the beginning of global war in the late 1930s, influential voices in the farm sector had grown uncomfortable with the regulation and controls of the New Deal farm program. With America’s entry into the war, Kansas farm men and women shook off the malaise of the past decade to do what they did best—create huge yields of wheat, corn, pork, and beef. These farmers demanded higher agricultural prices and government price supports, while at the same time they demanded less regulation over their activities. Ironically, while Kansas farmers were instrumental in helping feed a world at war, their huge wheat and corn harvests added to America’s already vast reserves of grain. Still, Kansas farmers demanded the resources and freedom to boost their production.

The Kansas farmer had the undeviating perception that abundant harvests led to prosperity, even when facts did not support this perception. As a result, they opposed wartime controls on their productivity and demanded guarantees of postwar agricultural supports. Through influential political leaders such as Senator Arthur Capper and Congressman Clifford Hope, Kansas farmers received government supports for their surplus production, draft deferments for labor to work their land, and maintained control over farm labor and their working conditions. Kansas farmers voiced their demands for federal intervention to increase their harvests and their profits. Then they pressured for the dismantling of federal controls designed to keep agricultural stocks in line with demand. Like other Americans during the Second World War, Kansas farmers wanted to bolster the war effort and profit from wartime prosperity. They wanted the best of both worlds: an economic safety net with fewer constraints on their operations. The Kansas countryside had seen upheaval and growing government involvement in its farms since 1929. By 1945 the farmers wanted neither.

51. “Prospectus for the National Democratic Farm Campaign, 1944.”