

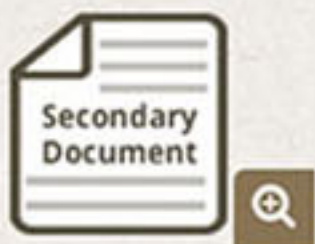
The Farmer Takes Direct Action

Creator: American Social History Project, City University of New York

Date: 2015

Source type: Historical Essay (secondary source, edited)

Introduction: This essay, written by historians, describes how farmers received very little help from the government at the beginning of the Great Depression and were forced to work together to save their **livelihoods**.



In the early years of the Great Depression, the government did little to help Americans who were hurt by the **economic collapse**. Many politicians felt that the economy would fix itself over time and that those in need should

be saved through private donations and charities. In 1930, President Herbert Hoover said, "I am convinced we have now passed the worst, and with continued **unity of effort** we shall rapidly recover."

Hoover's belief that the economy would recover quickly proved to be incorrect, especially for American **agriculture**. Farmers' income **plummeted** between 1929 and 1932 as both corn and wheat prices sank by more than 50 percent. The price of **raw cotton** fell by more than two-thirds. Conditions became so bad that many farmers could no longer earn a living, meet **mortgage payments**, pay back loans, or pay their taxes. Banks, which were also hit very hard by the Depression, attempted to gain back some of their lost **investments** by foreclosing on farms. This means banks would **auction off** the farms and the farm property of farmers who fell behind on payments. As a result, thousands of families lost their farms.

Faced with little help from the outside, farmers turned to other farmers and members of their local community for help and support. Joining together and working as a group was necessary at the time in order to stop the immediate danger some farmers faced of losing their farms and their **livelihoods**. It showed that farmers were not going to remain **passive** during the crisis. As author and journalist Ferner Nuhn wrote in 1933, **direct action** "has called attention to the **plight** of the farmer; it is **hastening legislative action** along the whole line of agricultural problems; [and] is resulting in organization of farmers, such as perhaps has no **parallel in history**."

Direct action was not a long-term solution to the problems farmers faced as a result of the Great Depression. But in the end, farmers did receive some relief from the government. When Franklin Roosevelt was elected President in 1933, he created the **Agricultural Adjustment Act**. The Act gave money and aid to farmers to help their farms survive during the depression.

An Iowa Farmer Remembers The Great Depression

Creator: Henry Terrell

Date: 1971

Source type: Oral History (Edited)

Introduction: This oral history of the Great Depression was recorded in 1971, almost 40 years after the events described. In this account, Iowa farmer Henry Terrell talks about how some farmers in his community banded together in the early 1930s to respond to economic hardships. He describes how they sometimes even used violent tactics to achieve their goals.



This was at a time that **mortgaging** of farms was **getting home to us**. So farmers was having **ten cent sales**. The banks would put up a farmer's property and have a sale and all the neighbors'd come in, and they got the idea of spending twenty-five cents for a horse. They was paying ten cents for a plow. And when it was all over, they'd give it back to the

farmer. It was legal and anybody that **bid** against that thing, that was trying to get that man's land, they would be **dealt with seriously**, as it were.

That **infuriated** all the people that wanted to carry on business as usual. It might be a bank or something like that. They had their **investments** in this. The only place they had of getting their **investments** was from the fellow who owed him.

But the people were desperate. They came very near hanging a judge, because they caught this judge **foreclosing farm mortgages**, and they had no other way of stopping it. He had issued the whole bunch of **foreclosures** on his **docket**.

Farmers also had marches. They came from all over the state. There was a **picket line**. The Farm Holiday movement was to hold the stuff off the market, to increase the price. The movement was violent, too. They stopped **milk wagons**, dumped milk. They stopped farmers **hauling** their hay to market. They undertook to stop the whole **agriculture process**.

They'd say: we're gonna meet at the fork of the road, and so on. Now they **spread it around the country** that they were gonna stop all the crops from going through. And believe me, they stopped it. They had whatever was necessary to stop them with. Some of 'em had **pitchforks**. (Laughs.) You can **fix** the auto tire good with a pitchfork.