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An Agricultural Law Research Article

## **Government and Agriculture in New York State**

by

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# Government and Agriculture in New York State

GOULD P. COLMAN

Prior to 1880 New York farmers had only a casual relationship to their government in Albany. Since that time a declining number of New York State farmers have significantly increased agricultural output. This increase in the farmers' capacity to produce has been due in large part to the government of New York State assuming in the forty year period following 1880 direct and continuing responsibility for the economic welfare of its farmer citizens. Other states assumed a similar responsibility during this period. The unique features of the New York experience are related to two interwoven aspects of its agricultural production-marketing complex—the primacy of the dairy industry and concentration of this industry's customers in a single metropolitan area, and the endowed basis of its land-grant institution.

Although the state had for many years prior to 1880 appropriated some \$28,000 annually for premiums to be awarded to outstanding produce at the state and county fairs, this money was divided among a number of private agricultural societies in such a way that little agricultural improvement resulted.<sup>1</sup> State efforts to place the dairy industry on an honest and hygienic basis were equally ineffective. As early as 1862 the adulteration of milk and the sale of milk produced under unsanitary conditions (as in the notorious distillery stables) was prohibited by law, but enforcement depended on the aggrieved citizen bringing suit against the offender. This method of administration, as well as the absence of clearly defined standards of purity, made enforcement all but impossible, a condition that continued into the 1880's.<sup>2</sup> For state regulation to be effective, an emergency situation was required such as that of 1878 when bovine

pleuro-pneumonia (the so-called lung plague) erupted beyond areas to which it had hitherto been confined. In this instance the governor was empowered to prescribe regulations, hire medical and veterinary practitioners, and call on sheriffs for enforcement.<sup>3</sup>

In 1880 the relationships between New York farmers and their government became less casual when the state established and undertook to provide continuing support for an organization devoted to increasing the efficiency of agricultural production. This organization, the New York Agricultural Experiment Station, was promoted by persons in the New York State Grange and at Cornell University who believed that agriculture could be advanced best through systematic experimentation. Their cause was aided by the spreading interest in science and technology and by the suspicion on the part of a number of users of commercial fertilizer that they were getting poor value for their money. It is one of the many ironies of institutional history that although the legislation creating the Station was drafted by members of the Cornell faculty, the Station was established some fifty miles from Ithaca at Geneva when members of Cornell's governing board showed insufficient interest in its acquisition. Although Cornell University was New York's land-grant institution, there was at this time no disposition to surrender even an element of private control in return for state support.<sup>4</sup>

State efforts to regulate the fertilizer trade preceded the establishment of the experiment

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<sup>1</sup> The first such state "encouragement of agriculture" was \$8,000 appropriated in 1841. *Transactions of the New York State Agricultural Society* (Albany, 1842), I, 12; *Laws of New York*, 1879, ch. 148. The conditions under which entries for premiums were produced were generally unknown to audiences at fairs and, in any case, were frequently irrelevant to commercial operations. W. C. Neeley, *The Agricultural Fair* (N. Y., 1935), 71, 170-171; *Transactions of the New York State Agricultural Society* (Albany, 1854), XIII, 496-497.

<sup>2</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1862, ch. 467; 1878, ch. 220, 237; 1884, ch. 202.

<sup>3</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1878, ch. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Gould P. Colman, *Education and Agriculture: A History of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University* (Ithaca, 1963), 71-73.

station at Geneva. The 1878 law requiring that each bag of fertilizer bear an accurate statement of its contents was a dead letter since, like laws already referred to, it was citizen-enforced; clearly few individuals were in a position to obtain a chemical analysis and, where indicated, press their grievances in the courts.<sup>5</sup> The experience of the Geneva Station in enforcing fertilizer control legislation made apparent the need for assigning this responsibility to an organization possessing technical skills and legal authority sufficient to overcome the fertilizer trade's capacity for circumventing efforts to make it responsible. By 1890, when the Station was authorized to enforce fertilizer control legislation, there were over 240 brands of fertilizer for sale in the state. Thereafter, the number of brands continued to increase, overwhelming the Station's facilities for analysis and confusing the purchaser with what appeared to be a multitude of different products, each of which bore impressive testimonials to its effectiveness. Yet the time had passed when the farmers of New York had to depend for corrective measures on their individual resources or those of their anemically administered voluntary organizations. The administration of the Station, in this instance, secured legislation placing a tax on each brand, a step which had the effect of quickly reducing the number of brands and bringing needed order to the merchandising of what was rapidly becoming a vital farm supply.<sup>6</sup>

Fertilizer control, however, was a minor part of the Station's operation. From the beginning its staff had concentrated on systematically pursuing agricultural problems to their underlying biological-chemical relationships. As a long term approach to the improvement of agricultural practices this orientation was sound. Indeed, the five-member professional staff contained men of considerable ability, and the director, E. Lewis Sturtevant, was unusually sophisticated in areas where, even today, experimental results are often difficult to explain.<sup>7</sup> Such an approach to agricultural research, however, had little apparent relevance to the problems of the farmer. Moreover, the publications of the Station were so technical that they did not always lead to enlightenment. Witness the reaction of a Buffalo editor: "It is said,"

he wrote, "that figures do not lie. If this be true, the report of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station contains a tremendous pile of truth."<sup>8</sup> The reports did indeed contain much truth, but it was truth of a kind which, in the pre-Adams period, was appreciated only by a small number of enlightened farmers and scientists.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Station in its first two decades did little to enhance its reputation with farmers, it performed a service of greater significance to New York and American agriculture by maintaining and promoting a standard of excellence in agricultural research. Ultimately, the objectives and methods of the Station under directors Sturtevant and Whitman H. Jordan had a constructive impact on agricultural research in other states and in the USDA.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the immediate response of the Station's farmer clientele to research beyond its understanding was to transfer its attention to the Department of Agriculture at Cornell University.

Isaac P. Roberts, head of Cornell's work in agriculture, was a former farmer whose research was oriented toward improving the practices farmers employed in their daily activities. He talked the language of farmers; they reciprocated with their trust. In 1886 they responded to a call issued by Roberts to attend a farmers' institute at Cornell to hear him and other informed agriculturists talk about better farming methods. Although the meeting was quite successful, a

<sup>5</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1878, ch. 222.

<sup>6</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1890, ch. 437; Liberty H. Bailey, *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture* (N. Y., 1911), IV, 516. The purpose of deceptive merchandising in the fertilizer trade was evidently to meet a highly competitive situation rather than to defraud the customer. The brands analyzed at Geneva in 1890 were generally true to label. *Report of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station, 1890* (Albany, 1891), 72-99.

<sup>7</sup> The first staff included S. M. Babcock, developer of the Babcock test for butterfat, and H. H. Wing, later head of Cornell's Department of Animal Husbandry. See the early annual reports of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station.

<sup>8</sup> Ulysses P. Hedrick, *A History of Agriculture in the State of New York* (Albany, 1933), 415.

<sup>9</sup> On the development of interest in basic research in agricultural experiment stations see Charles E. Rosenberg, "The Adams Act: Politics and the Cause of Scientific Research," *Agricultural History*, XXXVIII (January, 1964), 3-12.

<sup>10</sup> For a description of Jordan's contributions to agricultural experiment stations see H. C. Knoblauch, et al., *State Agricultural Experiment Stations* (USDA Misc. Pub. 904, May 1962).

single location placed decided limits on the effectiveness of the institute method, for only farmers living within a short distance of Ithaca could be served. Efficiency demanded that teachers travel to their audience and for this far more money was needed than the trustees of Cornell University were willing to spend for the instruction of farmers. It was with state support, administered through the New York State Agricultural Society, that the farmers' institutes quickly became an effective medium for the extension of agricultural information in New York.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the foregoing, the state created a regulatory agency during the 1880's which had direct and continuing relations with agriculture. By establishing the Dairy Commission in 1884, New York took a position in advance of other states; for, although the dairy industry was circumscribed elsewhere by numerous regulations, nowhere had a public authority been made responsible for their enforcement. The Dairy Commission quickly became involved in regulation of a far more sweeping character than anything the state had formerly undertaken. It not only sought to stabilize relations between the producer and processor of dairy products on an ethical basis, but also sought to protect both these groups from out-of-state competition. This competition came primarily from producers of oleomargarine. A law of 1884 prohibiting the manufacture and sale of this product in the state was far too ambitious to enjoy the support of the courts. Thereafter, by the slow process of litigation and amendment, the Dairy Commission developed legal formulae which succeeded in handicapping the producer and seller of oleo. Probably of greater significance in the long run were regulations drafted by the Commission establishing minimum standards for the composition of milk and milk products. These regulations benefited the consumer of dairy products while contributing to the improvement of New York agriculture for, in effect, they placed the power of the state on the side of the quality producer.<sup>12</sup>

Yet regulation proved less effective than its advocates had hoped. It was gradually realized that ignorance of sound procedures was a far more serious impediment to improvement in the dairy industry than the

actions of the deceivers. In 1888 the Dairy Commission was empowered to employ up to ten expert butter- and cheese-makers who were to instruct workers through visits to approximately 1,600 butter and cheese factories in the state.<sup>13</sup> The need for many more instructors was obvious at the time, but such men were not available. To develop these experts, a formal training program seemed desirable to enable students from all parts of the state to have access to expert instructors and adequate equipment during the winter months when the factories were closed. They, in turn, could go to the factories in the state and instruct their fellow workmen.

Both the State Experiment Station and Cornell University were obvious locations for such a program since each was doing research on cheese- and butter-making. In this situation, members of the Cornell staff moved quickly to establish a winter dairy school in 1892, in spite of the lack of an adequate building. It was not the intention of the Cornell trustees to provide such a building since it had become evident from experience in New York and other states that education in agricultural subjects would not attract private funds. Thus Cornell, in a noteworthy departure from previous policy, turned to the state and in 1893 a dairy building costing \$50,000 was erected on the Cornell campus at public expense.<sup>14</sup> In the same year the state made this appropriation, a beginning was made toward withdrawing public support from other private institutions engaged in agricultural education.

At the time Cornell received its dairy building, the state supported agricultural education through annual appropriations to the State Experiment Station, the Dairy Commission, the New York State Agricultural Society, the New York State Dairy-men's Association, the New York and New

<sup>11</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 90-91.

<sup>12</sup> The legislation restricting the sale of oleo was enforced at the level of the retail grocer. This was an initial step toward the formation of the Department of Farms and Markets in 1917. See George L. Flanders, "The Regulation of Dairy Products" in Bailey, *Cyclopedia*, IV, 503-507. Flanders was a senior employee of the Dairy Commission.

<sup>13</sup> *First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 1893* (Albany, 1894), 46; *Laws of New York, 1888*, ch. 298.

<sup>14</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 113, 116-117.

England Agricultural Society, and the Interstate Fair Society. The state's relation to agriculture was further complicated by the proliferating activities of the Dairy Commission. By 1893 this Commission functioned not only as a regulatory authority and educational agency with reference to the dairy industry, but also had responsibilities ranging from the prevention of disease in animals to the prevention of fraud in the sale of vinegar.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1890's a wave of enthusiasm for the codification of law struck the New York legislature. In accord with this sentiment, state aid to agriculture was rationalized in 1893. The Dairy Commission was abolished, its functions being assigned to a newly created Department of Agriculture. The farmers' institutes were also assigned to this department as were the funds to be distributed to the agricultural societies. Thereafter, state support for the agricultural societies was gradually reduced until, in 1904, it totaled only \$5,000. The state and county fairs which the agricultural societies had fostered with public funds became the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture.<sup>16</sup> The New York State Agricultural Society, which in its heyday performed exemplary services for New York agriculture, thereby lost its principal reason for existence. (Nonetheless, it continues to hold an annual meeting sixty years later.)

Following the state appropriation in 1893, Cornell University became a third channel through which New York State aided agriculture. Other states during this period made similar use of their land-grant institutions. In this national movement for extensive state aid to agricultural education, New York State was a leader and it was a leader in large part because Cornell University provided a platform from which Liberty Hyde Bailey could exercise his remarkable talents.

Perhaps Bailey's greatest asset was his capacity to relate his abilities to what he called the needs of the time. Upon his arrival at Cornell in 1888, the thirty-year-old plant scientist recognized that anyone who claimed acquaintance with the entire subject of agriculture (as Roberts did) or with even the subject of horticulture (as Bailey's title, Professor of General and Experimental Horti-

culture, suggested) was unlikely to do more than give wider circulation to existing information or misinformation. Such a practical problem as determining whether sod culture or cultivation was the more desirable orchard practice required a knowledge of how plants relate to their environment. This, in turn, required understanding of the physics and chemistry of soils as well as the chemistry, physiology, and pathology of plants. Yet little such knowledge existed. Having recognized the need, Bailey set out with characteristic energy to meet it. Through a wide personal correspondence, public addresses, and the books and articles he wrote and edited, he promoted specialized studies at agricultural colleges throughout the United States and encouraged graduate students to come to Cornell to become specialists under his guidance.

Much of Bailey's energy in the period prior to 1905 was devoted to making New York State financially responsible for the College of Agriculture at Cornell. Such a relationship he considered necessary if his broad plans for agricultural education were to be implemented. In 1904, after a heated contest with other universities which opposed state support of a unit of Cornell, the College of Agriculture became a state institution while remaining part of a privately controlled university. The contest was largely anti-climactic, for this relationship between the government of New York and Cornell's College of Agriculture had been evolving for many years.

The desire of members of the Cornell staff to be of service to farmers was one element in this relationship. Farmers' institutes, it has already been indicated, developed out of that sense of mission. Agricultural specialists, Bailey recognized, would ultimately earn a place on the public payroll by assisting New York farmers to improve their economic position. Improved spraying and pruning practices were demonstrated by Bailey and his assistants on many New York farms; the value of these farm visits, in turn, was recog-

<sup>15</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1887, ch. 105, 268; 1889, ch. 515; 1892, ch. 324.

<sup>16</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1893, ch. 338; 1904, ch. 728. State aid for agricultural fairs continued at a high level. In 1920, \$250,000 was appropriated. *Laws of New York*, 1920, ch. 165.

nized by a state appropriation for extension work at Cornell in 1894. Over the years the appropriation was increased as was the latitude permitted the Cornell staff in its expenditure. The act of 1904 making the College an agency of the state was a logical sequel.

In 1891, three years after Bailey had come to Cornell, the work directly related to agriculture was the province of four faculty members who carried on their research, attended farmers' institutes, and taught their miniscule classes with the modest support provided by Cornell University plus federal funds appropriated under the Hatch Act of 1887 and the Morrill Act of 1890. Twenty years later, with the support of the state, the faculty had grown from four to nearly forty and the student body from less than sixty to more than one thousand. By 1911 the staff could carry on plant research independently of weather with greenhouses and laboratories made available by the state and, with travel funds provided by the state, extend the limits of the experiment station to every farm by means of survey techniques. It remained to devise a system for adapting the results of research to the circumstances of the individual farm and agricultural business. Bailey and other educational administrators recognized the need to have an agricultural expert permanently stationed in each county who could relate the skills of the specialist to the problems of the producer.<sup>17</sup>

The Smith-Lever Act passed by Congress in 1914 offered to each agricultural county in the nation the possibility of having such a resident expert. In New York a pattern for the employment of county agricultural agents had developed through consultation between state and USDA officials which, although preceding the Smith-Lever Act, was consistent with its provisions.<sup>18</sup> The agricultural agent was hired by a voluntary county-wide organization called the farm bureau from a list of candidates suggested by extension administrators at the College of Agriculture. Once appointed, the agent was responsible to those administrators and through them to the USDA; for technical information, the agent looked to specialists at the College. At the county level he was responsible not only to the organization which hired him (and determined his salary), but also to the public

generally since part of his support came from the county board of supervisors. However, since the agents' job was to improve the position of farmers and agricultural businessmen by suggesting applications for research findings, they became most closely associated with the members of the farm bureau and the specialists at the College. When the interests of these groups became inconsistent with the provisions of the Smith-Lever Act (as interpreted by extension administrators), the agents usually acted in accord with the interests of their most immediate associates. This conflict of interest was most evident with regard to the organization of agricultural marketing and purchasing cooperatives. The county agents were drawn into helping promote and organize such cooperatives because of their skills, favorable position in the county, and personal enthusiasm for the cause of cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Extension administrators were unsuccessful in restraining them since the enthusiasm of the agents was shared by many farmers and the state government had taken a position favorable to the establishment of agricultural cooperatives.

In 1913, in response to a wave of antagonism against the so-called middleman in agricultural marketing, the legislature created a Bureau of Supervision of Cooperative Associations within the Department of Agriculture. Its superintendent was given "general charge of the development of agricultural co-operative associations." In addition, he was to "assist at the organization of such associations" and also "to assist them with aid and advice in the management and conduct of their affairs."<sup>20</sup> Before this bureau was well established, however, it was overshadowed by another agency, the Department of Foods and

<sup>17</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 98-329.

<sup>18</sup> The Smith-Lever Act was a means for resolving the competition between state agricultural colleges and experiment stations on one hand and the USDA on the other for the services of agricultural experts and the funds needed for their support. The act presumes continuing cooperation between the states and federal government with regard to agricultural education. Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 170, 195-197; A. C. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States, 1785-1923* (USDA Misc. Pub. 15, 1928), 84.

<sup>19</sup> In New York the county agents were supported by a combination of federal, state and county funds and by funds raised from farm bureau memberships. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 82, 170-171; Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 271-274, 277.

<sup>20</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1913, ch. 235.

Markets, which offered the possibility that the state might become even more deeply involved in agricultural marketing. This second agency, established with the status of a department and allowed a larger budget, was the result of the promotional efforts of John J. Dillon, publisher of the *Rural New Yorker*.

At some point prior to 1912, Dillon had recognized that the prestige of the New York State Agricultural Society could be capitalized upon politically. Since the agricultural leaders of the state had by this time largely abandoned the Society, he encountered little opposition, and in 1912, at a special meeting of the Society, he was able to obtain *carte blanche* authority to organize a committee to work out the problems of agricultural co-operation. The principal result of Dillon's work was a bill creating the Department of Foods and Markets. Passed in 1914 as part of the general business law, it empowered the commissioner to investigate the cost of food production and marketing to the point of being able to issue subpoenas as a means of obtaining evidence. In addition, the Department was authorized "to aid and assist in the organization of cooperative societies" and to establish public markets. Dillon was appointed the first commissioner.<sup>21</sup> Two years later in the milk strike of 1916, he missed an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the usefulness of his department.

Since the 1890's the demand for fluid milk in New York City had vastly increased following the enforcement of state and city legislation regulating the composition and purity of fluid milk. Farmers had invested in equipment and supplies necessary to produce for the fluid market since this had been more profitable than marketing to cheese factories and condenseries. However, in 1915 and 1916, the cost of these supplies had increased faster than the income from fluid milk. New York City milk dealers, faced with rising costs of distribution and consumer resistance to an increase in the price of milk, attempted to maintain their economic position by holding down the price which they paid the farmer. It was at this time that farmers turned in increasing numbers to the Dairy-men's League, a milk marketing organization which prior to 1916 had few accomplishments to its credit. It was the large membership re-

cruited in that year which made possible a successful milk strike that October.<sup>22</sup> This strike resulted not only in a substantial price increase for dairy farmers, but also established the League as an effective bargaining agent for its members.

It was the county farm bureau agents who, by assuming the brunt of the effort for recruiting League members in the months prior to the strike, placed the League in a position of strength. Farm bureau offices served as county headquarters for the membership campaign; and, in many counties, in defiance of instructions from extension administrators, farm bureau agents acted as recruiters and spokesmen for the League organization.<sup>23</sup> At the conclusion of the strike the League's Executive Committee recognized "the valuable services" of the farm bureau agents: "This work," stated the Committee, "should never be forgotten by dairymen in the counties where these hustlers labored. The milk dealers may later try to smother appropriations for these Bureaus. Don't allow it."<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, John Dillon's part in the milk strike was a record of missed opportunities. In order to avoid being enjoined by court order for conspiring to restrain trade, the Dairymen's League had made the Department of Foods and Markets its bargaining agent with the milk dealers. Dillon, however, proved more inclined to obstruct than negotiate; finally, his presence was felt to be the principal barrier to negotiations between the League and the dealers. "Dillon," said the president of the League after the strike, "was a nuisance to everybody connected with the matter. . . . The dairymen could and would have got better terms with Dillon out than with him in."<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, a number of strident articles in the *Rural New Yorker* further alienated leaders of farm organizations at a time when their bargaining power

<sup>21</sup> *Preliminary Report of the Joint Legislative Committee on Dairy Products, Livestock, and Poultry* (Albany, 1917), 360-361.

<sup>22</sup> The transcript of the hearings of the Joint Legislative Committee on Dairy Products, Livestock, and Poultry, is an excellent source of information concerning New York agriculture for the period 1900-1916, MS 16 vol., Mann Library, Cornell University.

<sup>23</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 175-177; author's interview, Thomas E. Milliman, Feb. 25, 1964.

<sup>24</sup> Executive Committee Bulletin 22, reproduced in *Preliminary Report*, 322.

<sup>25</sup> *Preliminary Report*, 331-333.

was rapidly increasing in Albany. In 1917 Dillon's department was merged with the Department of Agriculture to form the Department of Farms and Markets. Although the authorization under which Dillon had bargained in the name of the state with processors and distributors on behalf of agricultural interests was continued, its use after 1917 was marked by caution.<sup>26</sup>

An investigation by the legislature into the costs of producing and marketing dairy products, livestock, and poultry also had a significant impact on the formation of agricultural cooperatives. The hearings of the Wicks Committee during the summer and fall of 1916 were judiciously managed and, at the same time, conducted with a shrewd eye to publicity. They contributed to an atmosphere conducive to negotiations between milk producers and distributors by determining that increases in farmers' costs of production justified an increase in the price of milk at the farm and that dealers were reluctant to grant this increase, not because of a mythical milk trust, but because the retail price of milk in New York City had become as traditional as the streetcar fare.<sup>27</sup> Since the agricultural press and upstate newspapers generally had little interest in protecting the city consumer from rising milk prices, they used the information coming out of the hearings to encourage farmers to support their own marketing organization—the Dairymen's League.<sup>28</sup> In its report to the legislature, the Wicks Committee approved the organizing efforts of farmers "because of the effective organization of the consumer in a city society, and the lack of a similar organization in the social relations of the producer."<sup>29</sup> It further concluded that the state had a responsibility for protecting dairymen from the consequences of unrestrained competition between milk distributors. The distribution of milk should be regulated as a public service, stated the committee, in such a way as to "permit the elimination of all unnecessary investments both of labor and capital and effectively control the business operations of the remainder."<sup>30</sup> In order to make clear that this desire for state regulation implied no approval of the activities of John Dillon's Department of Foods and Markets, the Wicks Committee called for the creation of a new department which, for

a start, would have "the capacity to thoroughly analyze and comprehend the present situation." Following the recommendation of the Wicks Committee, the Department of Farms and Markets was established.<sup>31</sup>

The prepared feeds purchased by dairy farmers also came within the purview of the Wicks Committee. High protein supplements to home-grown feeds were necessary to maintain milk production during the winter months, and without such winter production the dairyman could not keep his fluid market. This situation made dealing in dairy feeds so attractive that some unscrupulous persons elected to engage in their manufacture or distribution. It was widely suspected that many proprietary feeds were not up to the standard advocated by the highly respected Professor E. S. Savage of Cornell University, and this suspicion was encouraged by the secret formula of these feeds. The only way farmers could assure themselves of quality feeds was by purchasing carload lots mixed according to Savage's formulas and many such orders were placed through the county agents. The New York State Grange and the Dairymen's League also attempted to supply farmers with known formula feeds but in each instance met with little success due to inadequate knowledge of the feed business, inadequate capital, and the highly effective efforts of the New York State Retail Feed Dealers' Association to prevent reputable feed manufacturers from supplying cooperatives. The exposure of the activities of the Feed Dealers' Association by the Wicks Committee and the collection of evidence indicating that New York farmers were spending many thousands of dollars each year for chaff and floor sweepings strengthened the determination of farm organization leaders to form a purchasing cooperative sufficiently

<sup>26</sup> *Rural New Yorker*, Feb. 19, 1916, 291; Oct. 28, 1916, 1373; Nov. 4, 1916, 1399; Dec. 23, 1916, 1567; Feb. 10, 1917, 202; Mar. 10, 1917, 383; Mar. 24, 1917, 465; *Laws of New York*, 1917, ch. 802; see also E. R. Eastman, *Walking the Broad Highway* (Ithaca, 1956), 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> *Preliminary Report*, 142, 290-292, 576-577.

<sup>28</sup> R. D. Cooper, "Origin and Development of the Dairymen's League," MS, 4, Collection of Regional History, Cornell University.

<sup>29</sup> *Preliminary Report*, 580.

<sup>30</sup> *Preliminary Report*, 605.

<sup>31</sup> *Preliminary Report*, 579, 891-892; *Report of the Department of Farms and Markets for the Year 1921*, 9-10.



strong to compete successfully with the aroused businessmen already in the field.<sup>32</sup> That such an organization was established in 1920 is a tribute to the organizational efforts of farmers and county agents during the three years following the report of the Wicks Committee.

After the decline in the power of the New York State Agricultural Society in the 1890's, only the New York State Grange could claim to represent the interests of all farmers, and in 1917 the Grange was still widely respected and supported in New York. However, its emphasis on social functions and its lack of continuity in leadership weakened the authority with which it could speak in Albany. On the other hand, the county farm bureaus had in their own membership and in their county agent employees a potential for strength with the state legislature and state administration far greater than that the Grange could achieve. To establish a medium through which this strength could be exercised, representatives of the county farm bureaus meeting at Cornell University in February, 1917, formed the New York State Association of County Farm Bureau Associations, later called the New York State Farm Bureau Federation.<sup>33</sup>

During the following year a legal challenge to the marketing activities of the Dairymen's League led to a swift and successful reaction which secured for the cooperatives a privileged position among businesses in the state. This issue was precipitated in January, 1918, when the District Attorney of New York County obtained grand jury indictments charging the officers and some of the directors of the Dairymen's League with conspiring to raise the price of milk. Since the New York City papers were strongly consumer oriented in their treatment of the case, a change of venue to Utica was granted and thereafter the District Attorney lost interest. The indictments, however, so alarmed farm organization leaders that they pushed a bill through the legislature which declared that an association of farmers, gardeners, and/or dairymen engaged in making collective sales for its members was not to be regarded as a conspiracy.<sup>34</sup>

Since most issues facing farm organizations lacked the drama and urgency of grand jury

indictments, coordination of effort, where it occurred at all, was accomplished with great difficulty. A conference, where heads of the major farm organizations could identify problems common to large sections of New York's agriculture and work out a course of action to meet them, offered the possibility of greatly increasing the strength of agricultural interests in the state. This was recognized by two former county agents who, in 1919, occupied positions from which they could promote greater cooperation among the major farm organizations. Edward R. Eastman, as editor of the *Dairymen's League News*, was a key official in that organization. Howard E. Babcock, as county agent leader at Cornell and principal founder of the State Farm Bureau Federation, was a guiding force in the formation of farm bureau policies. Both men were closely connected with the State Grange. The New York State Conference Board of Farm Organizations, created in 1919, was primarily their handiwork and for thirty years they bore a continuing responsibility for making the Board an effective force in New York agriculture.<sup>35</sup>

The Conference Board soon became recognized by state lawmakers and administrators as the spokesman for the interests of New York agriculture, and formal procedures were adopted whereby the Board could inform these officials about governmental activities or potential activities it desired or opposed.<sup>36</sup>

The confidence of the leaders of the major farm organizations in what might be accomplished through cooperation also made possible the establishment of the Grange League Federation Exchange in 1920. Successful cooperative purchasing of feeds and seeds in competition with established companies required a substantial financial and psychological investment from a large number of farmers. That the G.L.F. secured a volume of business sufficient for survival was

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Knapp, *Seeds that Grew: A History of the Cooperative Grange League Federation Exchange* (Hinsdale, N. Y., 1960), 12-19; *Preliminary Report*, 789-832.

<sup>33</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 271-273.

<sup>34</sup> Cooper, "Origin and Development of the Dairymen's League," 15; *Laws of New York*, 1918, ch. 491; *Rural New Yorker*, Jan. 19, 1918, 81; Feb. 2, 1918, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 279.

<sup>36</sup> Author's interview, Edward S. Foster, Sept. 24, 1963.

due to former county agents occupying key positions in the organization who were thoroughly acquainted with farmers and farming and had a keen sense of public relations. For many years Howard E. Babcock was general manager.<sup>37</sup>

Two areas wherein state agencies further affected agriculture remain to be mentioned—the programs for the control of animal and plant diseases, and secondary agricultural education. The State Health Department, in order to protect consumers from diseases communicable from animals to man, carried on a test and slaughter program with emphasis on bovine tuberculosis beginning in 1892. This program was taken over by the Department of Agriculture and other programs were developed under its administration for the control of diseases which jeopardized the livestock industry in the state. Where these programs resulted in the slaughtering of animals after testing farmers were indemnified for their loss, although in many cases not sufficiently to secure acceptable herd replacements. Authority to control serious plant diseases was assigned to the Department of Agriculture at its establishment in 1893.<sup>38</sup>

Agricultural education in secondary schools began in the Middle West during the 1890's and thereafter, in a wave of enthusiasm for vocational education, was introduced in other states. In 1910 courses in agriculture were introduced into the public secondary schools of New York with state support.<sup>39</sup> After some legislative log rolling, six separate state secondary schools of agriculture were established by 1912, two of them in connection with endowed universities.<sup>40</sup>

It remains to consider the consequences of the state's relationships to agriculture. While it is clear that substantial increases in the productivity of agricultural workers and in the quality of food products reaching consumers can be traced to these relationships, there were a number of government programs which had the effect of bolstering the *status quo* in agriculture. Some of these programs, continued in the face of considerable evidence that the approach was outmoded, resulted in a waste of public and private resources. Cases in point were the state's efforts to prevent the sale of oleomargarine and to maintain farm units which would not provide their oper-

ators with an adequate standard of living.

State efforts to limit the sale of oleo in the interests of the dairy industry extended over half a century.<sup>41</sup> In 1893, according to the Commissioner of Agriculture, "a large share of the time and attention" of his department was required to prevent Armour and Company from selling oleo in New York since decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission and the U. S. Supreme Court gave Armour a claim to legality for its sales in the state.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter, the Department of Agriculture continued to devote "much concern as well as much work" to combating the sale of a product demanded by a large number of consumers,<sup>43</sup> at one point resorting to the futile expedient of increasing the penalty for violation by defining a violation as the display of a single package for a single day.<sup>44</sup> These efforts of the state were not only detrimental to consumers but, when pursued over a long period of time, were also damaging to the interests of dairymen in that they contributed to the maintenance of standards for the composition and pricing of milk which placed a premium on butterfat, thereby delaying adjustments in the dairy industry to a market demanding not milk fat but milk solids.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Thomas E. Milliman, *What Went Before* (Ithaca, 1962), 33–63; Knapp, *Seeds that Grew*, 41–133.

<sup>38</sup> *Laws of New York*, 1892, ch. 487; 1893, ch. 338. Although up to \$125 could be paid by 1917 as indemnity, the payments were often insufficient to replace high producing animals when such stock was in great demand. *Laws of New York*, 1917, ch. 660. For the problems involved in securing "clean" herd replacements see Harold L. Creal, Oral History Memoir, 1963, Collection of Regional History, Cornell University. *First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1893* (Albany, 1894), 88–90.

<sup>39</sup> Dick J. Crosby, "Agriculture in Public High Schools," USDA, *Yearbook*, 1912, 474.

<sup>40</sup> Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 181–182, 203–204, 378.

<sup>41</sup> The circumstances attending the end of state efforts to restrict the sale of oleo are described in an oral history memoir of Warren Hawley, Jr., 1963, Collection of Regional History, Cornell University.

<sup>42</sup> *First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1893* (Albany, 1894), 14–32; Edward Wicst, *The Butter Industry in the United States* (N. Y., 1916), 241–244.

<sup>43</sup> *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture* (Albany, 1911), 63.

<sup>44</sup> Thus, offering fifty packages for sale for three days constituted 150 violations. *Laws of New York*, 1897, ch. 554.

<sup>45</sup> Recently some dealers have refused to accept milk which contained butterfat in excess of the legal minimum. *American Agriculturist*, July 1963, 4.

By the first decade of this century empty farm houses were appearing in all parts of the state. In the better agricultural areas this occurred as farms were incorporated into adjacent farms to form a single unit capable of providing an operator with an adequate living based on the level of agricultural technology existing by 1900. In the poorer agricultural areas empty houses were often associated with the abandonment of the land for agricultural purposes. These phenomena were noted by George F. Warren in a 1907 survey of Tompkins County agriculture which has since become recognized as a landmark in the development of agricultural economics.<sup>46</sup> This study contained the following conclusion: "Empty houses in certain sections have attracted much attention. . . . The population in most such sections is still larger than present economic conditions warrant. Any attempt to fill these houses can only result in failure."<sup>47</sup> In the year prior to Warren's study, the state undertook a program aimed toward preserving existing farm units and, in spite of further evidence supporting Warren's position, continued this program until 1921. A Bureau of Farms and Labor each year gave wide circulation to a booklet which contained up to 300 pages of descriptions of farms for sale in the state. These booklets were introduced with carefully selected statistics and text which implied that all the farms described therein were viable economic units. In 1920 the Bureau of Farm Settlement, as it was then called, claimed that "fully 75 per cent of all farms sold in this state can be traced directly to our farm bulletin." Special efforts were directed toward persuading immigrants arriving in New York City to settle on what proved to be some of the least desirable land in the state.<sup>48</sup> The results were as Warren predicted. Before the state completely reversed its policy in 1931 and began a purchasing program to remove from agriculture land unsuited for the purpose, it had guided thousands of its citizens and potential citizens toward farms capable of providing only a low standard of living and restricted educational opportunity for farm children.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the contacts between New York farmers and government have, of course, been with the federal rather than the state government; yet few of the federal agricultural

programs have, for any extended period of time, been administered independently of some agency of the state. In part this is due to pressures for decentralized administration which have existed throughout the United States; in part it is due to the effective communication between agricultural organizations in New York State and agencies of the state government and a willingness on the part of agricultural interests to support state agencies in their efforts to secure federal programs adapted to the needs of New York agriculture. For example, since 1938 the New York City milk market has been operating under an order administered jointly by the state and federal government—the only case of joint administration of a milk marketing order in the United States. It seems clear that this arrangement was made possible only because state officials were able to negotiate with federal officials from a position of strength based on their relationships to farm organizations which have been described in this paper.<sup>50</sup>

Since 1920 the relationships between state government and agriculture in New York have remained stable. Agricultural interests continue to communicate with government, and state support and regulation are implemented through much the same channels that were utilized four decades ago. Although the political influence which farm groups in the state can muster has declined since 1920, agricultural businessmen have in recent years formed a council through which they can support positions taken by the Agricultural Conference Board.

<sup>46</sup> Henry C. and Anne Dewees Taylor, *The Story of Agricultural Economics in the United States, 1840-1932* (Ames, Iowa, 1952), 356-365.

<sup>47</sup> G. F. Warren and K. C. Livermore, "An Agricultural Survey—Townships of Ithaca, Dryden, Danby and Lansing, Tompkins County, New York" (Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, *Bulletin*, 295, 1911), 568.

<sup>48</sup> *Report of the Department of Farms and Markets for the Year 1920* (Albany, 1922), 17; State of New York Department of Agriculture, *Bulletin* 1, 2, 1906; 3, 1908; 16, 1910; 67, 1915.

<sup>49</sup> T. E. LaMont, "State Reforestation in Two New York Counties" (Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, *Bulletin* 712, February, 1939), 5; William Allen, "The Utilization of Marginal Lands" (Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, *Bulletin* 476, May, 1929), 9-13.

<sup>50</sup> Author's interview, Charles J. Blanford, Aug. 31, 1964; Colman, *Education and Agriculture*, 427-428.