

Farmers Helping Famers: The Rise of the Farm and Home Bureaus, 1914-1935

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predominately focus on the twentieth century. Local and state efforts in the nineteenth century to eradicate predators, specifically wolves, grizzly bears, cougars, and coyotes, that threatened the economic production of livestock, gave way to more effective systematic federally funded and federally managed cooperative efforts. Between 1915 and 1930, the era Van Nuys terms the “‘golden age’ of predator control,” the Bureau of Biological Survey policed predators as killers bereft of moral and economic value (52). So essential was the bureau’s work to the economic and environmental interests of early conservationists that even Aldo Leopold “strongly supported the federal government’s approach to robust predator control as a vital tool in realizing his goal of saving deer and other popular game animals” (57).

By the mid-twentieth century, however, the use of poisons such as strychnine, cyanide, and Compound 1080 generated increasing concern about the “biologically unsound and exceedingly dangerous” effects of total eradication (129). In addition, the emerging field of ecology improved scientists’ understanding of the trophic relationship predators had within ecosystems. New concepts such as Paul Errington’s “economy of nature” along with the Department of the Interior’s report on wildlife, known as the Leopold Report, highlighted the importance of predation within natural systems and sparked a reform movement that generated sweeping wildlife protections culminating in the Endangered Species Act of 1973. But, as with the rest of the environmental legislation passed in the 1970s, the Sagebrush Rebellion and subsequent Wise Use Movement during the Reagan Administration polarized predator control and wildlife restoration, especially wolf reintroduction, grizzly bear preservation, cougar expansion, and coyote tolerance.

Van Nuys reminds readers that although most Americans do not have to think about these predators, “passionate minorities, whether committed to ensuring that the ‘beast gods’ will always be around or wishing to do all in their power to visit destruction on the damned ‘varmints’” keep predator control at the forefront (256). His words are timely, considering that in the last decade, wolves, bears, cougars, and the ever-present coyote have been the subject of news stories throughout Iowa and the Midwest. Predator control continues to require our attention, and Van Nuys’s work is a timely reminder of the history of our relationship with these animals.

Farmers Helping Famers: The Rise of the Farm and Home Bureaus, 1914–1935, by Nancy K. Berlage. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. ix, 308 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$48.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Jenny Barker-Devine is associate professor of history at Illinois College. She is the author of *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945* (2013).

Nancy K. Berlage makes a significant contribution to the historiography of American agriculture in *Farmers Helping Farmers*, a fresh and innovative examination of the farm and home bureaus that made up the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). To date, most historical studies of the AFBF have been largely critical investigations of the organization's role in federal politics, with most asserting that the AFBF catered to wealthy elites at the national, state, and even county and township levels. Berlage offers a new interpretation of the farm bureau movement by synthesizing cultural and gendered frameworks and taking into account broader trends in organizational growth, the professionalization of knowledge, and technological and scientific innovation.

The first county farm bureaus appeared in 1914, following passage of the Smith-Lever Act and the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service. In order to maximize the reach of extension agents based in land-grant universities, entrepreneurial farmers invited agents to speak with neighborhood groups about the latest trends in agricultural production and to oversee trials on members' farms. They established farm bureaus as a means to better organize programming and create an organizational structure wherein individual farmers encountered the sweeping changes in the American countryside during the early twentieth century. In an effort to standardize their message and consolidate leadership, the county farm bureaus became part of a complex hierarchy when the AFBF formed in 1919. Rather than casting the AFBF as a monolithic organization, however, Berlage reveals the complex, often contested spaces within that hierarchy that relied on a membership willing to negotiate organizational financing, representation, and programming. While she rightly acknowledges that incomplete records make it unlikely that we will ever have a complete picture of membership demographics, she ultimately concludes, "Moderate means typically sustained the farm bureau" (23–24). In other words, the effectiveness of the AFBF required a massive, diverse membership base.

Berlage's well-crafted narrative integrates broad theoretical concepts and historical trends with case studies from local records in Iowa, Illinois, and New York, many of which are still housed in county farm bureau offices. The third chapter exemplifies this approach, as Berlage carefully synthesizes case studies on bovine tuberculosis within the contexts of emerging scientific knowledge, contests for cultural authority, and community building. Bovine tuberculosis brought together public health officials with agricultural scientists seeking legitimacy, veterinarians

ying to professionalize their field, extension personnel, and ordinary farmers who relied on one another to keep the disease at bay. Whereas many studies of the farm bureau portray the organization as imposing standards and beliefs upon unsuspecting, often suspicious farmers, Berlage acknowledges the complexity of changing agricultural practices. She effectively argues that even with occasional bouts and eruptions of violence, the campaign to eradicate bovine tuberculosis was ultimately successful because those involved negotiated “organizational and cultural strategies” that benefited all constituents.

It is in the gendered analysis of the farm and home bureaus where *Farmers Helping Farmers* truly breaks new ground. Farm bureaus self-identified as organizations for the entire family, which required men and women to work cooperatively. Again, a number of previous studies identified the farm bureau as prescribing separate spheres ideologies and urban-based gendered roles on resistant farm women. Yet Berlage finds that the establishment of home bureaus and women’s auxiliaries occurred as a result of extensive, ongoing negotiations wherein women purposefully and simultaneously applied separatist and integrationist strategies. They legitimated their expertise as homemakers by creating powerful, all-female spaces with authority over domestic affairs, all the while asserting their roles as agricultural producers and mutual decision makers with their husbands. Such complex strategies allowed women to intentionally move within gendered spaces without overtly challenging gendered ideals. This was also true of youth programs, where males and females engaged in activities that employed “pliable” gendered parameters (199). Although women did not “topple” male authority in the farm bureaus, they subverted “prevailing assumptions by positing that gender roles had to be learned through scientific education and socialized through organizations” (186, 157). Berlage captures and skillfully explains complicated relationships in farm families and agricultural organizations, making it possible to move scholarly discussions forward toward a more nuanced understanding of gender roles in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Farmers Helping Farmers ends in 1935, in the midst of tremendous change for the AFBF and American agriculture as a whole, leaving the reader curious to know more about later decades and even how the AFBF operates in the twenty-first century. In her conclusion, however, Berlage invites scholars to continue breaking down conceptual categories, especially urban and rural and male and female. She acknowledges that there is more work to be done on the racial dimensions of the rhetoric of purity, whiteness, success, and community within farm and home bureau programming. Berlage has established a firm foundation

that encourages further research on the continued evolutions of agricultural organizations, technological change, community building, and gender roles.

The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America, by Gabriel N. Rosenberg. Politics and Culture in Modern America Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 290 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$55.00 hardcover and e-book.

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“Fretting about the countryside is a great American pastime” (1). So states Gabriel N. Rosenberg as he begins his book, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America*. 4-H, an educational organization for youths administered by the federal government, was designed, in part, to alleviate that anxiety. Rosenberg details how, through 4-H, “the state” increasingly penetrated life in the countryside; as he does so, he unmasks the state’s role in managing “the production of sexuality and intimacy” (236 n.26). This multifaceted, sophisticated interpretation will challenge even those already familiar with 4-H to revise their understanding of its broad social and cultural impact.

Rosenberg’s complex and nuanced analysis interweaves three narratives, simultaneously offering an institutional history of 4-H from the early 1900s through the 1970s; an interpretation of the political economy of modern agriculture; and an account of how 4-H operated as “biopolitics” — a concept defined by the scholar Michel Foucault as a political strategy rooted in biology (4, 233 n.1). This biopolitical framework allows Rosenberg to critique the control and power that 4-H (as a state apparatus) exerted by prescribing particular ideals about the physical and moral health of the body, marriage relations, and sexuality. Programmatic policy and discourse mutually reinforced this power. For me, the visual aid reproduced on page 141, which was used to teach boys about health, illustrates this nicely: it juxtaposes photographs of slight boys growing into sturdy ones with corn nubs developing into full cobs.

In chapter 1, Rosenberg traces the origins of 4-H to Progressive Era critiques maintaining that the countryside was in decay and its population threatened by moral and physical degeneracy and racial decline. 4-H was envisioned as a means of ensuring the reproduction of healthy, wholesome farm people by training youth in home economics and agriculture, as well as in appropriate gender ideals and behaviors. Rosenberg gives fresh life to previous interpretations of these critiques by revealing