The Kansas Beef Industry

Wood, Charles L.

Published by University Press of Kansas

Wood, Charles L.
The Kansas Beef Industry.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81264

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2768360
Some historians see the depression after World War I as a watershed in the history of American agriculture. During that time, technology, among other factors, enabled producers to supply far more than could be consumed, but the cost of production was much greater. Society began to question more than it ever had before whether rural life was actually superior to an urban existence, as many people had thought it to be. But most important in making this depressed period a landmark was the increased willingness of farmers and ranchers to seek government relief. The war had taught agricultural producers that government action could change economic conditions during an emergency in wartime, and many producers came to believe that the government might also deal with economic emergencies in a time of peace as well. As a result, rural folk spent more time and energy attempting to persuade the government to abandon its *laissez-faire* attitude toward agriculture.1

Kansas cattlemen were among the first organized rural groups to seek government help during the postwar period. As early as the fall of 1919 a group gathered at the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri, to plan strategy for a Chicago meeting with the Big Five Packers and for a visit with government officials in Washington. Walter R. Stubbs was elected chairman of the group, which also included Joseph H. Mercer, George Donaldson, Dan D. Casement, John A. Edwards, and some forty others, all prominent in the Kansas beef industry.

In Chicago the delegation questioned the meat processors about declining livestock prices. To account for the decline, the packers cited the FTC investigation, the government-encouraged unrest over food prices, and the fear of restrictive legislation. They finally passed the buck on to Washington.
The cattlemen, although not necessarily convinced of the packers’ innocence, departed the following day for Washington, where they eventually met with Kansas legislators, USDA officials, and Attorney General Palmer. Stubbs, with obvious contradiction, criticized the secretary of agriculture for failing to obtain both higher meat tariffs and more foreign markets, while KLA President George Donaldson berated Palmer for his stand against the packers’ supposed hoarding of meat. After some debate, the attorney general promised that there would be no prosecution for the alleged hoarding; thus, the packers should not fear government intervention in slaughtering for storage. But, he added, his office would continue to urge regulation of the large meat processors.

Before returning to Kansas the disparity between livestock and retail meat prices was graphically demonstrated to the disgruntled cattlemen at a local eating establishment. “Thin slices of roast beef cost more in Washington for the delegation than a cow would cost in Kansas,” Edwards snorted, and many of the Kansas cattlemen protested by eating a fish supper. “They couldn’t afford beef. Stubbs took soup,” Edwards added. Then Edwards turned his wrath toward retailers, claiming that they added 100 percent to the carcass price of meat as their gross profit. “It is disheartening to realize,” Edwards continued, “that the charge from the butchers’ block to the consumers’ kitchen is as much per animal as the cost of raising, grazing, feeding, fattening, and marketing the animal, plus the freight, the commission, the packing house expense and profit, plus freight to the retail shop.”

After returning to Chicago to report that the packers were safe from prosecution for hoarding, the Kansas delegation returned home. Nothing significant resulted from the expedition, but the protesting delegation from Kansas was part of the larger movement that worked for the adoption of the Packer Consent Decree and eventually the Packers and Stockyards Act. The trip to Washington illustrated the growing recognition by Kansas cattlemen that government action was an essential part of the solution to their difficulties.

After their success in getting the Packer Consent Decree and the Packers and Stockyards Act, stockmen turned to other areas in which they believed government action could aid the industry, concentrating first on higher tariffs, then on agricultural credit. Most farm representatives were convinced that high protective tariffs were necessary for agriculture to prosper. Industry, they reasoned, prospered behind tariff walls; why not agriculture? The
Democrats' Underwood Tariff, they believed, was based on the folly of free trade.

Likening agriculture to industry was a delusion, however. The two sectors of the economy were not comparable in all respects, agriculture's inability to control production being the most notable difference. What United States agriculture really needed at the time was not the reduced foreign markets that resulted from higher tariffs, but rather low tariffs to encourage larger exports. The simple fact that before foreign countries bought they must first sell was passed over in favor of the clearer lesson—at least in the minds of producers—that was gleaned from the growth of manufacturing as a result of high duties. The delusion, of course, was understandable; yet, the success of agricultural interests in getting higher tariffs probably worked to their ultimate disadvantage.

In 1921 Congress passed the Emergency Tariff Act, which, at the urging of the farm bloc, included prohibitive duties on twenty-eight agricultural commodities, including wheat, corn, meat, sugar, and wool. This temporary protectionist measure was made permanent by the Fordney-McCumber Act the following year. Both tariffs included duties on manufactured goods, which farmers and ranchers increasingly realized caused them higher production costs; but they were willing to trade rising tariffs on manufactured goods for the right to set those on farm products about as high as they wanted them. Imported beef was taxed at three cents a pound and lamb at four cents, compared to one and a half cents and two cents in 1909, a relatively high tariff year itself. Live cattle were taxed at an ascending rate, depending upon their weight, ranging from $1.50 to $2.50 per hundred.

Kansas cattlemen applauded these duties, as did most other stockmen, although some midwestern feeders complained about the high tariffs on imported stockers and feeders when the domestic supply began to appear inadequate. Kansas stockmen, however, were unsympathetic toward lower tariffs on live cattle. When fifty-four carloads of Canadian feeders arrived in the state during a single week in 1927, Mercer fired off letters to Senators Arthur Capper and Charles Curtis demanding much higher duties.4

Agriculture did not respond to the high tariff rates as well as producers had hoped, and shortly after the Fordney-McCumber Tariff became law, they began advocating additional rates. Imported hides were an article of special concern, as the tariffs of the early twenties had left hides on the free list. Duties were added later, but many cattlemen believed that they were too low. Over 35 percent of the hides used in the United States, Mercer claimed in
1925, came from Mexico and South American countries. This was an outrage to the domestic cattle producers, he felt, and it had caused cattlemen to lose $225 million over the previous five years.

Nor did the high tariffs exclude all canned meats. A 1926 issue of the *Kansas Stockman* reported that Rodney Edward, a Kansas stockman-farmer, was recovering “from the shock of learning that for some time he had been eating Argentina and Uruguay canned beef.” Fresh meat and livestock from South American countries were excluded, due to the fear of importing hoof-and-mouth disease, but canned meats and cured hides were allowed to enter. The low South American production costs, cattlemen believed, were unfair competition. They were especially outraged when some of them discovered that they were eating the lower-priced, imported product without knowing it. “Here am I,” Edward grumbled, “a cattleman in the heart of the cattle country, buying and eating South American beef.”

The effect of imports on domestic prices, however, was not nearly as great as cattlemen generally believed. According to one study, the quantity of imports was so small compared to domestic production, and the amount of beef consumed was so elastic, that tariffs could not be blamed for declining prices. It also revealed that complete exclusion of foreign beef would have done little to raise prices.\(^5\)

Despite this study on the effects of the tariff, however, most stockmen demanded higher and higher tariffs. Mercer made several trips to Washington during the second half of the decade to spur Congress toward that goal. In 1928 he advocated tariffs levels three times higher than the existing duties; a year later he testified that over 206 million pounds of meat and meat products were being imported each year, to the decided detriment of American cattlemen. Congress failed to act, however, until the 1930 passage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff. This pushed protection to an all-time high with *ad valorem* rates estimated to be up 30 to 40 percent. Over seventy farm products were included among the protected items, including a 10 percent *ad valorem* rate on hides and shoes.

Mercer proudly remarked that it was “the best tariff agricultural and livestock interests have ever had,” and that stockmen finally had what they wanted with this new tariff—except, one might add, higher stock prices. But by this time their problems were more serious than the threat from imported meat, and the long-sought tariffs did nothing to improve the declining state of agriculture.

Mercer had worked hard to sell Congress on higher duties but, curiously,
had passed up a Coolidge appointment to the Tariff Commission, where he might have been influential in effecting higher rates sooner than 1930. Mercer's refusal—at the urging of the KLA executive committee—illustrated the value they placed on his services to the industry as a whole in many areas besides tariffs. Mercer and a number of other agricultural leaders continued to work for still higher duties, even after the Hawley-Smoot Tariff helped set off a wave of increased duties throughout the world. In the end, agricultural prices remained low, and United States exports declined over 75 percent between 1929 and 1933.6

When the Trade Agreements Act was considered in 1934, cattlemen and most other agrarians labored diligently to defeat the new thinking on import/export trade. They were unsuccessful, however, and a tradition of almost forty years of rising tariffs was reversed when Congress authorized the executive branch to raise or lower duties through reciprocal trade agreements. Tariffs, of course, could be raised, but many farmers and ranchers knew that the trend would be toward lower duties. The most-favored nation principle of the new agreements was also anathema to many rural groups.

By 1939 some twenty-two reciprocal agreements were in force. Average duties had declined from 46.7 to 40.7 percent, and the quantity of United States imports and exports had gone up. The value of United States crop exports, however, remained about the same throughout the whole period from 1932 to 1938, although quantities increased when conditions allowed surpluses. Low prices kept the total value stable. Beef exports remained essentially the same throughout the whole decade of the thirties, never exceeding 1 percent of domestic production and usually staying closer to 0.5 percent.7

Cattle and beef imports were slightly higher than exports, amounting to 2.8 percent of home production in 1930. They declined from that the next few years, but then climbed to 3.3 percent in 1935 and 4.8 percent by 1939. Rising imports were triggered by lowered tariffs, by decreased domestic supplies, and by rising cattle prices toward the end of the decade. Much of the canned meat reportedly came from American-owned packing companies in South America. The live imports were principally the stocker-feeder class from Mexico and Canada, after both countries had negotiated reciprocal treaties with the United States. Combined imports from these neighboring countries amounted to over 744,000 live cattle in 1939.

Most cattlemen were enraged over the imports, and had few kind words for Secretary of State Cordell Hull and his reciprocity schemes. "The cattlemen and sheepmen have been sold down the river by a bunch of brain trust-
ers,” one Kansan remarked; but, in fact, the imports had little effect on the industry. Midwestern feeders were usually happy that the foreign cattle were available, and it is doubtful that enough stock or meat was imported to affect market prices seriously. In addition, a meat embargo continued to protect cattlemen against large shipments from Argentina, one of the world's leading beef-producing countries. World War II and disruptions in world trade occurred, however, before any accurate measure of the effects of these increased imports was determined. 

Throughout the decades following World War I farmers and ranchers sought additional government programs to assist agriculture. Marketing was their principal area of concern during the twenties, but there was much demand for programs that would aid them in production as well. The McNary-Haugen proposal, which resulted in a long and sometimes bitter fight, is a good example of the kind of aid they sought. Originated in large part by George N. Peek and espoused by the “red-headed, pipe smoking Secretary of Agriculture” Henry C. Wallace, the McNary-Haugen proposal called for a two-price system for basic agricultural commodities, including cattle, sheep, and swine. Cattle, however, were dropped as a basic commodity after a temporary rise in prices around 1926. Behind protective tariff walls, high prices were to be set for domestic agricultural products, while surpluses were to be purchased by the government and dumped on the international market at whatever price they might bring. The proposal, however, was never given a trial. It was defeated in Congress during the early twenties, then failed twice to get President Coolidge's approval during the last years of the decade. 

Coolidge, of course, held the trump card on the McNary-Haugen proposal and used it, but dissension within agriculture's ranks also contributed to its defeat. While the Plains cattlemen generally favored the bill as long as beef was considered a basic commodity, there were some who advocated its defeat. William J. Tod, former president of KLA, and Dan D. Casement were two Kansas cattlemen who were much opposed to this particular type of government intervention. Most cattlemen in the state, however, appeared to favor the McNary-Haugen idea, especially before cattle were excluded as a basic commodity. Mercer repeatedly argued for direct government support. To critics who cried “socialism” and “class legislation,” he replied, “Why not?” Other sectors of the economy, he said, profited from government help. Now it was agriculture's turn for aid in its time of crisis. McNary-Haugenites even
received support from the bastion of republicanism at Emporia headed by William Allen White. He had made a study of local indebtedness early in 1922 and concluded that "the mortgage records in Lyon County indicate that in a few years we shall have a peasantry instead of an independent manhood upon the western farms" unless the government became more involved with agriculture. But support from Kansas was insufficient to carry the day.10

While the McNary-Haugen Bill was being debated, Mercer and others advocated an agricultural commission with power to balance production and consumption as well as to make desirable changes in marketing and distribution. Organizations like the trade associations and large business combinations of urban industries served as the pattern. The consolidation in nonagricultural sectors of the economy resulted in less competition, Mercer and others pointed out, and had a large effect on their successful existence. In a letter to President Coolidge in 1924, Mercer noted that the country had sufficiently catalogued and discussed the needs of agriculture. "Hence our conclusion," he continued, "that a permanent federal agricultural commission with authority of law would be of far greater consequence in solving the perplexing and difficult problems of agriculture than continued investigations." Marketing problems, Mercer believed, were the key to most of agriculture's difficulties. He also proposed that the commission be empowered to establish what he referred to as systematic production. Few details of what systematic production meant were supplied to the press, but Mercer appeared to have in mind a vague notion of production controls.

Once Mercer's letter to the president was published in the *Stockman*, there was much response from cattlemen in the area. Judging from letters that were published, Mercer's idea was favored by about eight to one. Some of the letters suggested various modifications, but essentially they all favored some type of government control of production, price fixing, or systematic marketing. One perceptive writer even suggested that a producer's attitude toward government aid was based not so much on philosophy as it was on his degree of financial solvency. "The greatest foe of agriculture," wrote John S. Hill, a Kansas hog producer, "is in the ranks of the farmers themselves, and consists of the man who has made his, while land was cheap and easy to get, and refuses to see [that] the younger man [is hampered] by reason of modern conditions."

A few letters in opposition to Mercer's proposal were also published, and, in accordance with Hill's reasoning, several of them were from well-established producers. Tod, for instance, wrote Mercer, "I dread to think that you
have inhaled some of the dust from such a deadly fungus as the McNary-Haugen bill.” Another view illustrated that some stockmen had already despaired of ever getting any government aid and questioned its effectiveness even if it should materialize. Charles E. Collins—Kansas farmer-stockman, Colorado banker, and manufacturer of veterinary supplies—who had supported earlier efforts for government aid, now wrote to Mercer that he had “about reached the conclusion that the thing for the producers to do is to just stay at home and work like hell and not know anything, and he will think things are alright.” Collins continued, all “we know about agriculture, economic questions, agronomy, astronomy, astrology, bacteriology, butrology, personallgy, plokshiechanisjehanbosne [sic], and every other damn thing that one could know [has not been] worth a five cent piece. . . . The less you know, the less you worry.” He failed to explain, however, how ignorance and less worry might raise prices.

The Manhattan stock feeder and showman Dan D. Casement was also among those who condemned government-aid proposals at this time. Casement had been educated at Princeton University—he was said to be the only stockman in the country who recited Browning to his cattle and Horace to his horses—before he assumed control of a ranch in Colorado, a farm in Ohio, and a spread a few miles north of Manhattan known as Juniata Farm. It was reported that he would spend days riding the ranges of the Matador Land and Cattle Company looking for a “wonder calf” to be fattened and sent to stock shows. Frequently, Casement’s feeder and fat stock won top prizes at the nation’s major stock shows.

Throughout his life Casement was unalterably opposed to what he called government handouts to agriculture. He opposed the McNary-Haugen Bill, Mercer’s proposal for an agricultural commission, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), and any other plan that appeared to compromise what he considered to be the traditional values of rural America. In 1926 Casement wrote that “the farm is the last fortress of individualism in a new social order, governed by group interests and complicated by the complexities of modern mass life.” Legislation could not reverse the laws of nature that sent or withheld moisture, nor, he believed, could it affect the economic law of supply and demand. This opposition to government aid during the twenties proved to be only a warm-up for the vast opportunities that Casement would have to oppose such aid during the following decade.¹¹

There was, then, some opposition in Kansas to almost all the proposed aids to agriculture, including Mercer’s agricultural commission. But Mercer’s
plan generally had wide support within the state, even though it implied much more control over production than many other proposals did. How much Mercer's thinking influenced the shaping of the Farm Board, which was eventually created by the 1929 Agricultural Marketing Act, was not completely clear. Most likely it had little more influence than most of the other proposals that came to Washington during this decade, and the suggestions for agricultural relief were legion. Will Rogers once remarked during the twenties that "farmers have had more advice and less relief than a wayward son. If advice sold for 10 cents a column, farmers would be richer than bootleggers." Rogers was not far off the mark.\textsuperscript{12}

The postwar financial situation also illustrated that farmers and ranchers encouraged a larger government role in their industry. As the bottom dropped from under wartime prices and the easy money for agricultural expansion began to dry up, many producers believed that the federal government was obligated to provide credit and debt relief. The government, they noted correctly, had encouraged much of the expanded debt, yet obligations contracted during the heady days of the war were almost impossible to repay once deflation began. To make the situation even tighter, there were stepped-up demands by a number of banks for the repayment of existing loans. Even the Federal Reserve made credit more difficult to obtain in 1920 by temporarily imposing progressively higher discount rates for larger loans. Farmers and ranchers naturally and legitimately began to desire government relief.

Agricultural credit needs varied a great deal. Land purchases, for example, required loans for as long as forty years, while loans on cattle were needed for from three months to four years. All loans, according to borrowers, should be at low interest rates.

Credit for the beef industry at this time, as in the past, came mostly from private sources. The Federal Reserve Banks were of little help, as the six-month limit on discounted paper helped only feeders. Stockmen complained that the Federal Reserve kept interest too high—around 6 percent during the 1920s—and was too restrictive in making loans. The Federal Land Banks were not of much help in the area of long-term credit, as the amount the banks loaned even to their select clientele was usually quite small. In 1923 the maximum was increased from $10,000 to $25,000—at 5.5 percent—but even this failed to alleviate the scarcity of credit, as few borrowers qualified for the maximum amount. In 1924, for instance, the average Federal Land Bank
loan in Kansas was only $4,198, hardly enough to buy much of a farm or ranch. Just as important was the absence of intermediate credit, a system that provided loans for the several years that they were often needed.

The first attempt to correct the credit situation for cattlemen was a cooperative effort by the Stock Growers' Finance Corporation, which discounted its first cattle paper in 1921. Almost $50 million, including $1.3 million from seventeen institutions in Kansas City and $150,000 from twelve in Wichita, was pledged to a pool for discounting loans. The rate was 7 percent, but the loans were renewable for up to thirty months in order to provide capital for herd owners who were breeding cattle. M. L. McClure, a former Kansan with Federal Reserve experience, headed the institution. Kansas cattlemen were optimistic at first, but when they realized that prospective loans still had to qualify under Federal Reserve standards and that discount rates were 1 percent higher than those of the Federal Reserve, their optimism evaporated. And this was the case across the nation, as only about $20 million of the available money was ever loaned.

Stockmen continued to press for government action, and finally in 1921 Congress authorized the War Finance Corporation—replaced by the Agricultural Credit Corporation in 1924—to rediscount the cattle paper of private lending institutions. This paper was discounted at 5.5 percent for a six-month loan and at 6 percent for an advance that lasted a year. Most important for a large number of borrowers were the practices of granting loans that did not qualify under Federal Reserve standards, of loaning nearly the full value of a herd, and of accepting feed as part of the collateral.

Over $300 million was pumped into the cattle industry by the War Finance Corporation by the middle twenties, and this no doubt saved a number of stockmen from disaster. Some banks and a few cattlemen, according to Mercer, complained of the red tape—the initial application was thirteen pages of detailed items—but the major complaint was that these efforts were also too small for the need that existed. By the end of 1922, for instance, Kansas stockmen had received $3.5 million from the corporation, or, according to Mercer, only 20 percent of what was actually needed. But, in view of the declining market for livestock at this time, additional capital might have resulted in unnecessary expansion and even lower prices.

Congress in 1923 also created twelve Intermediate Credit Banks in an effort to satisfy long-term capital needs. Loans to cooperative marketing agencies were also a prime consideration of these institutions. They provided some relief, but they became of more importance during the next decade.
When cattle prices improved after the middle twenties, the pressure for government-secured loans declined as private sources again became willing to satisfy much of the demand. In the end, the government venture, notably that of the War Finance Corporation, had been only moderately successful. Producers suffered at the end of the decade from much the same lack of long-term, low-interest credit as before. But they did not forget the government's efforts during the early twenties. When the severe depression of the next decade settled down upon their mortgaged farms and stock, they again turned to Washington for relief.13

The government's involvement in agricultural credit during the thirties became increasingly complicated and even more extensive than it had been before. Most important to the producer was the fact that the involvement became permanent. Credit for farmers and ranchers became critical after the crash in 1929, although bankers were slow to admit it. Many lending institutions, some capriciously and others to protect their depositors, not only refused to make loans for agricultural purposes but also called in existing loans or refused extensions. The Stockman noted in 1931 that the large banks in Kansas had "their vaults filled with money," yet refused to grant loans that they would have readily accepted only two years before. During the early thirties, there was little doubt that immediate and long-term credit was one of agriculture's greatest needs, but many banks were slow to agree. Mercer polled most of the state's bankers during 1930 and found that nearly half of those polled said no to the question asking if there was a need for long-term agricultural credit, or failed to respond. Freight rates, in the bankers' view, were the most serious problem confronting producers.14

Along with calls for general inflation—one stockman-banker, Charles E. Collins, suggested that the government print and issue $100 million in greenbacks each month and then recall them at a rate of $50 million per month after the depression—Kansas producers turned increasingly to governmental agencies for credit. Until the New Deal period they were continually disappointed. Federal Land Banks did not compensate for the decline in commercial credit, even though Congress during the early thirties tripled the money available to them. The Intermediate Credit Banks had never been very effective, although some $64 million was dispensed or discounted between 1929 and 1933 in the whole Tenth Federal Reserve District, the unit which includes Kansas. There was some additional help from the Regional Production Association which was created in 1932. Using funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Production Credit Association that was located in
Wichita had loaned about $10 million by April, 1933. A prominent Kansas banker-cattleman, Cal Floyd, directed the Wichita institution and believed that it was "one of the greatest movements the government had ever undertaken." There was criticism, however, because many applicants were turned away. Those who received loans complained of the slowness with which the paperwork was done. 15

Although inadequate, as far as farmers and ranchers were concerned, all the government efforts in the field of agricultural credit from the time of President Wilson were important as a foundation for subsequent programs. The desperate financial condition of American agriculture compelled President Franklin D. Roosevelt to take speedy action soon after he took office. Within a few months of his inauguration the president had created the Farm Credit Administration (FCA) by executive order, and Congress had passed major agricultural legislation, including the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act. These measures combined the government programs providing credit to agricultural producers and placed the various institutions under the governor of FCA.

The FCA supervised and coordinated several major efforts to supply more credit. To aid the Federal Land Banks, Land Bank Commissioner Loans were created, primarily to assist with a second mortgage those farmers and ranchers who were already obligated. Foreclosure of farms in the Tenth Federal Reserve District declined from 167 to 94 the first two years the commissioner loans were available. Production and marketing loans were also made by the Intermediate Credit Banks. By discounting the paper of the Production Credit Corporation, the ICB supervised local associations of producers and made loans to local marketing and purchasing cooperative agencies. Later, they began to discount loans made by the Farm Security Administration—now called the Farmers Home Administration—which proved to be especially helpful to small ranchers. 16

Most cattlemen were delighted with New Deal efforts in this area. Among the advantages in the new system were relatively low interest rates, expanded rather than reduced credit during emergencies, and local management for the production and cooperative associations. An indirect benefit was the fact that ranchers and farmers were forced to keep better records of their operations. Since the thirties the federal system has generally satisfied a large part of the credit needs of range stockmen. Feeders, however, have depended more on commercial institutions; but they, too, have indirectly benefited from the government's efforts. Several Kansas cattlemen publicly lauded these aids.
to the beef industry, and just a few months before his untimely death Mercer noted that "probably the greatest aid government has rendered agriculture as a whole has been in extending financial help to distressed farmers and stockmen."\(^{17}\)

Despite all the government aid, however, commercial lending institutions were still the dominant source of agricultural credit in 1941, holding 62 percent of the farm mortgages and 70 percent of the outstanding short-term credit. More convenient locations, less red tape, and the traditional patterns of rural borrowing helped account for this. Private institutions obviously served a vital need, but because of their obligations to depositors and shareholders their effectiveness was limited during the thirties. One historian has written that commercial banks have tended to be "fair-weather friends, ready to supply credit when it was easy to get and to people who had little difficulty getting it anywhere; but were conspicuously absent in times of stress or for the person who was not the choicest client." The government system created during the New Deal did much to correct this situation.\(^{18}\)

President Hoover, the last Republican president until after World War II, made a final attempt to aid the agricultural sector, but those ranchers who advocated a larger government role were disappointed with his Agricultural Marketing Act. Although stockmen were better off than dirt farmers during the late twenties, they still expected help. The act, for the most part, was designed to assist cattlemen in marketing their stock through cooperatives. A lot of talk about production controls and price setting emanated from the Farm Board that was created by the act, but little was accomplished by what some referred to as the Republican 4-H Club of Hoover, Hyde, Hell, and High Taxes.\(^{19}\) Hyde was secretary of agriculture in Hoover's Cabinet.

Mercer and a number of Kansas cattlemen parted company with the Farm Board over its decision to aid stockmen only through bona fide existing or newly created cooperative associations rather than established livestock organizations. The board's proposals for orderly marketing, the expected but undefined effects that this would have on production, and the establishment of an agency to provide more marketing information were not foreign to Mercer's thinking. In fact, he claimed early in 1930 that "the Kansas Livestock Association was destined to take a major part in the new evolution of the livestock industry which is being sponsored by the government." But Mercer and KLA, like many other agricultural representatives, wanted more than the board offered, and at the very least expected KLA to participate on
an equal basis with cooperative associations in any decisions related to the state's livestock industry.  

Despite the Farm Board and other government agencies, the economic condition of stockmen declined rapidly during the early thirties. When the new Democratic administration took over in 1933, demands for government action increased conspicuously. Washington responded in kind, which led former United States senator Henry J. Allen of Wichita to compare Roosevelt and the New Deal to the new preacher that a deacon had just heard. "He is the most powerful man in prayer I have heard," the deacon reported, "he asked the Lord for things that the old preacher didn't even know that Lord had."  

By 1933 few producers were unwilling to "ask the Lord" for help, and the urgency was illustrated by the frequency with which calls were sent out from Kansas. At a KLA-sponsored emergency conference in Emporia in 1932, Mercer addressed the group on the causes of the depression. Expressing a principle of agricultural fundamentalism, Mercer told his listeners that agriculture's plight was the basic cause of the depression and that the government must secure a more equitable system of income distribution. Two months later, Mercer said that the government was "morally obligated to aid in effecting an economic readjustment in livestock production and farming generally."  

The AAA, created in 1933, provided producers with one of their first real opportunities for government help from the New Deal. Basically, the AAA intended to raise farm income through production controls, the nemesis of agriculture for over a decade. The AAA also had power to purchase surpluses, to withdraw land from production, and to make marketing agreements. The wheat program, which included payments for diverted acreage, eventually proved to be one of the most popular AAA practices in the state.  

Rural participation in the formulation and administration of AAA programs was also stressed. In the livestock sector, participation first appeared in the National Corn-Hog Committee of Twenty-Five, a group that represented the producer and advised AAA of acceptable programs. This committee eventually recommended an emergency program for government purchases of surplus hogs, then suggested that a permanent system be devised that included reductions in corn-hog production and a two dollar per hundred-weight processing tax. The AAA accepted most of the recommendations,
Although it did make the hog reduction program more stringent than had been recommended.

Mercer represented Kansas corn and hog raisers at several meetings in Washington and Chicago, but before departing he met with some of the state's leading producers to discuss possible plans. Those attending meetings were divided on specific proposals, but all favored a definite program and expressed their willingness to cooperate. Throughout the discussions of the National Corn-Hog Committee, Mercer opposed the processing tax, as well as the particular type of imposed limits on production that most other committee members supported. He believed that the corn-hog problem could best be solved with price supports, marketing agreements, and higher tariffs.

Kansans were divided on the corn-hog program throughout AAA's few years of operation. When Mercer polled KLA members on whether the hog program should be extended into 1935, judgments varied. One thought it was "the first time . . . an intelligent effort has been made to help agriculture to be put on a parity with industry," and another said he knew "of no words to express my contempt for such an idiotic, senseless, unworkable scheme to usurp the American farmers' freedom." Arnold Berns, past president of KLA, believed the problem was too technical for the average farmers' consideration. Berns supported his stand by noting that, if he went to the Mayo Clinic, he would not solicit the opinion of the whole Rochester population. In the end, Kansas was the only state to vote negatively on the 1935 program, although many of the state's producers participated in the program after it had been ratified by a large margin nationally.

The relationship of the AAA to the cattle industry also indicated the government's desire to please the producers. Throughout the first few months of Roosevelt's administration and while AAA was being debated, cattlemen found themselves in the dilemma of wanting aid but opposing production controls and processing taxes like those being suggested for the corn-hog program. Their failure to appreciate the significance of the 15 percent rise in cattle population since 1929 and the fact that cattle prices had not yet fallen as low as other farm commodities accounted for much of the opposition to government production controls. The fear of higher retail prices and reduced consumption kindled their opposition to processing taxes. Additionally, many cattlemen believed that a government-enforced marketing agreement with packers was adequate to curtail production, along with government-financed elimination of diseased animals and selected spaying of females. A Texas cattleman, according to one historian, even suggested that Secretary Wallace
equip the hind legs of all bulls with roller skates, rather than subject the cattle producer to planned production. Beef purchases for relief, higher tariffs, and public money for financing a campaign for more consumption were also suggested.\textsuperscript{24}

As a result of the producers' opposition, cattle were written out of the AAA program as a basic commodity, but this was acceptable to cattlemen for only a short time. As prices continued to fall, as the drought became more severe, and as they learned that other AAA programs hurt them—cotton, wheat and corn reduction, for example, raised feed prices—cattlemen began to agitate for more consideration. During the initial phases of this campaign, leading Texas cattlemen—notably Dolph Briscoe, who was president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association—spearheaded the drive to get cattle accepted as a basic commodity. Though KLA failed to support the movement until after its southern neighbors had got the ball rolling, it did throughout this whole period lead the fight against a processing tax.

Although cattlemen were unsuccessful throughout 1933 in restoring cattle to the basic commodity list, other measures were taken to help them, including beef purchases by the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC). Then, at the Albuquerque convention of the American National in January, 1934, those who favored cattle as a basic commodity forced a vote on the issue. The result was indecisive even though about 90 percent of the Texas delegation favored the proposal. The American National did, however, appoint a committee of five to study and recommend further actions.\textsuperscript{25}

Shortly after the Albuquerque meeting of the American National, Secretary Wallace called more than a hundred cattlemen to Washington to discuss proposals for the beef industry. From this number, seventeen were selected as a manageable working group. They, in turn, recommended that cattle be made a basic commodity, and that a committee of twenty-five cattlemen—later reduced to five—be appointed to devise a plan for production control, a requirement before Wallace would approve AAA money for the beef industry. Mercer was a member of both groups and had by this time accepted the necessity for production controls, although they were contrary to his preference for limiting production through marketing agreements.

The Jones-Connally Cattle Act of April, 1934, resulted from the long agitation for government aid. It made cattle a basic commodity, authorized $200 million as compensation for reduced production, and provided an additional $50 million for the purchase of diseased stock. A definite plan for production control, however, had to be worked out before any funds were

238
allocated. While cattlemen and AAA officials debated a permanent plan, they realized that the severe drought of 1934 had changed many of the circumstances. Immediate relief, not long-range planning, became the order of the day, and all thinking and action turned in this direction. 26

While producers described conditions in the most extreme terms—and there was, no doubt, some commercial value in this type of rhetoric—the 1934 situation certainly merited immediate governmental consideration. In Kansas feed was scarce in many sections and water was in even shorter supply. Governor Landon aided the stockmen by persuading some of the state’s oilmen to lend deep-well pumps, pipelines, and tank trucks for use in distressed areas. This was repeated in 1936, which was as severe a drought year for Kansas as 1934. Landon and Mercer also labored to find feed that could be shipped in from other states. Railroads transported the feed at reduced freight rates and provided reduced tariffs on cattle that were shipped to feed. Still there were more cattle than there was feed and water, and something had to be done to reconcile the differences. 27
On June 19, 1934, President Roosevelt signed an order to create the special Drought Relief Service, and purchases of drought-stricken cattle began two weeks later. The Drought Relief Service worked through state and county representatives in determining drought areas and the cattle to be purchased. Eventually, every state west of the Mississippi River except Washington was declared a primary or secondary drought area, as were counties in several other states east of the Mississippi.

Cattle were usually inspected by local men assisted by Bureau of Animal Health officials. Inspectors first determined whether the animals were fit to be shipped to other feeding areas or to slaughter, or whether they had to be killed in the immediate area due to weakness or disease. After the cattle were appraised, benefit payments to the owner amounted to $3 to $6 per head in addition to a purchase payment that ranged from $1 for young calves to $14 for stock two years or older. If the owner chose to sell, he was required to share the purchase money with the mortgage holder, if one existed, who in turn waived any claim to benefit payments. Payments were made, for the most part, from funds provided by the Jones-Connally Act and other emergency appropriations, and from money available to the FSRC.28

Many years after purchase of drought-stricken cattle in 1934, a Kansan told an apocryphal story that he claimed had been popular in the southwest part of the state. The urgency of the situation, the story went, pressed a young biologist into service as an appraiser. He did well, it was reported, until he encountered several goats in the district where he was working. He had never seen goats before, so he wrote to Secretary Wallace that he had been “executing your orders here in the Southwest, but I have discovered a new and unusual animal. I have never seen any thing like it before,” the young man complained. “The animal seems to have a very sad face, has whiskers on its chin, and its hindend is worn slick. Would you advise I shoot some of them?” Wallace was greatly disturbed when he received the communication and immediately wired back: “For God’s sake, don’t shoot any of the animals described in your letter, those are ranchmen.”29 Regardless of whether the story was true or not, it did illustrate the skepticism with which some producers viewed government agents and the new directives from Washington; but in the end, cattlemen were forced to admit that the program had been helpful.

Purchases of cattle in Kansas were typical of those in most other states, although the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) provided better organization than some areas had. The KERC was begun in 1932 to admin-
ister Reconstruction Finance Corporation funds; but before the emergency of the thirties was over it directed a multitude of activities, including work relief projects, service to transients, and food distribution, in addition to operations related to cattle purchases. John G. Stutz directed KERC, but as much authority as possible was delegated to local officials. In the cattle program Stutz was assisted by Dean Harry H. Umberger of Kansas State College, V. L. Morrison, E. M. Evans, and dozens of local officials.30

The month of July, 1934, was the hottest month on record in Kansas. The average temperature during the whole summer broke a forty-eight-year record, and this after four successive years with hot temperatures and little rain. Cattle purchases began in July, the first in Meade County. By the end of the month so many cattle were pouring into Wichita awaiting reshipment to southern states, eastern Kansas counties, or slaughtering plants that private feeders had to be contracted temporarily. Seven months later, 521,164 beef and dairy cattle had been purchased from every county in the state except Allen. Heaviest purchases were in counties just west of the Flint Hills in central Kansas, while the lightest buying occurred in the eastern part of the state. By January 15, 1935, purchasing was completed.

Kansas producers received payments that totaled over $7.5 million, an average of $14.44 a head. Of all the states that supplied cattle to the government, the $14.44 a head was one of the highest payments made, and the 3 percent condemnation rate in Kansas was one of the lowest, a credit to the efforts of the Sanitary Commission to eliminate diseased stock during the twenties.

While it was not always possible to do so, the government purchasers made a concerted effort to eliminate all diseased animals from herds, as well as to preserve the better breeding stock from slaughter. Some 15,000 registered cattle from several states, for instance, were sent to Indian reservations as foundation stock, and their owners were compensated by an average of $45.00 per head. Most producers appreciated the opportunity to eliminate the poorer quality or diseased stock from their herds, but by the same token many were also reluctant to sell their better stock. About 10,000 sheep and a few angora goats were also purchased.31

If cattle fit for human consumption were not shipped to other pastures, they were slaughtered and the meat distributed to the needy by the FSRC or some other designated agency. Much of the slaughtering was done by major packers, but many smaller plants were also used. In Kansas the KERC negotiated contracts with eighteen plants for this work. In addition, it al-
lowed counties that had adequate local butchering facilities to slaughter a few of the cattle for the immediate distribution of fresh beef to needy families. Local butchers in about thirty-five counties in the state slaughtered over 8,000 head, with a considerable savings in transportation and storage.

The KERC also established nine beef-canning plants in the state for the dual purpose of processing the beef purchased and providing work relief. Existing or remodeled plants were used to process 102,231 cattle into almost 13 million cans of meat. For the short time they were in operation, about 9,000 men and women worked in the plants. Many of them gained experience that was utilized later in private concerns after the KERC plants had closed.

In all, over 8.3 million cattle were purchased, with almost half of these coming from Texas and the Dakotas. Only about 18 percent of the purchase was condemned, the remainder being used for food. The belief that many would not survive shipment to feed or slaughter was the most frequent reason for condemning cattle. The government purchases, in conjunction with heavy commercial marketing, reduced the 1934 cattle inventory by 11 percent. Producers were paid a total of $11.7 million by the government, and it was estimated that they received $120 million more from their commercial marketing than they might have without the government program. The effect of the government's purchases on cattle prices following 1934 is difficult to determine, however, as the surplus was reduced by commercial marketing as well. But it was evident to producers all over the country that prices during the fall of 1935 were over 50 percent higher than they had been in 1934. For many, this spoke for itself.

Nevertheless, a number of people complained about the program. Producers wanted higher prices, even though they were paid more than the stock would have brought on the open market. They also demanded larger purchases, and called frequently for the abrogation of the promise to participate in future government controls on production. There were also complaints on administrative procedures. The American National once charged that the program was in the hands of economists and theorists, all “qualified” by the fact that they knew nothing about the real situation. Some saw the purchases as the first step in the government's takeover of the industry, which would lead to the cattlemen's loss of independence, or as an insidious vote-getting scheme.

There were also many who supported the program. On the whole, most producers were happy with the sale of their cattle. Widespread approval
encouraged one Texan to report to *The Cattleman* in 1934 that "President Roosevelt is much greater than Moses, because he is leading millions of people out of the depression and Moses only led a relatively small number of people out of the Wilderness." Others talked of the government "saving" the industry, or preventing a "complete demoralization" in beef-industry circles. But, in fact, the program neither saved nor destroyed the industry. Rather it protected many cattlemen, bought their stock when there was no other market, and prevented a great deal of unnecessary suffering on the part of starving, thirsty cattle. Additionally, it provided work relief for a short period, and a lot more beef for relief recipients than they would have otherwise received.\(^{34}\)

Kansans' reactions to the cattle purchases were similar to their response to most AAA measures. The corn-hog plan was least popular, while cattle and wheat plans received the greatest support. Kansas, in fact, led the nation in the number of wheat producers who participated in diverting acreage and in the amount of payments received. By the time the Supreme Court dispensed with the AAA, Kansas had received a total of $87.5 million in government payments, third highest behind Iowa with $94.2 and Texas with $148.2 million.\(^ {35}\)
Stockmen have traditionally had a poor reputation as conservationists, and drought condition focused much public concern on ecology. Even before the thirties many accounts of the practices of nineteenth-century cattle and sheep producers stressed their overgrazing grassland and destruction of vast areas of public domain. Certainly, some destruction resulted as stockmen hurried to use as much of the public's grass and water as possible before others did. Not all stockmen failed to conserve the national resources, but the public generally viewed stockmen as destroyers of the natural environment. New Deal conservationist efforts, however, helped not only to improve the cattlemen's deplorable reputation but also to change many of their wasteful practices. The government, for instance, established guidelines for more efficient use of the public grassland, and made payments to help develop water-saving ponds and to establish grazing practices that preserved the native grass. Although stockmen sometimes resisted governmental guidance, they came to appreciate the efforts after a while and in the end became known for their conservationist work.

The Taylor Act of 1934 was the first major thrust of the New Deal into the area of conservation. Designed to correct past evils, the act withdrew from possible settlement most of the unappropriated public land in the West and organized much of it into grazing districts. Kansas stockmen did not profit directly from the Taylor bill. Rather, they probably suffered some loss in the marketplace in competing with stockmen who grazed cattle on public land at low fees, but only on rare occasions did they object to the inequity.

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936 was the most important piece of New Deal legislation related to conservation. This act, largely an expedient to circumvent the 1936 Supreme Court ruling that voided much of the first AAA, kept federal funds flowing into the agricultural sector of the economy by paying farmers and ranchers to shift to soil-conserving crops and to adopt other conservationist practices. With the Supreme Court in mind, Congress now provided funds directly from the United States Treasury rather than from a processing tax. Payments for shifting away from soil-depleting crops—which were said to be surplus crops like wheat—averaged $10 an acre, while cattlemen benefited from the 35 cents per animal per month payment that was made for allowing range land to reseed itself through deferred grazing. Cattlemen were also paid $1 per linear foot for digging additional stock wells, 10 cents for every hundred linear feet of contour ridging of the range, and 50 percent of the cost of some pond con-
A number of cattlemen felt that contouring was as advantageous to landowners as any practice to come out of this period.

In all, Kansas received by far the largest payment made to any state during the first year that the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act was in force, but the largest portion of this went toward diverting wheat acreage. Payments remained high for the rest of the thirties, although a limit of $10,000 to any one farmer or ranchman was set in 1939.36

In addition to the several federal agencies that were involved in conservation work in the state during the thirties, the KERC sponsored work relief projects related to conservation. Much of KERC funding eventually came from the federal agencies created to provide relief, although some early efforts had been paid for by the state. Some of the CCC camps in the state exemplified KERC's activities, being administered by the state and paid for largely with federal money. Towards the middle of the decade KERC's work was taken over by other agencies, especially the Works Progress Administration.

Practical conservation work that directly affected stockmen related primarily to grass and water. Because it was impossible to reduce herd strength rapidly without severe economic loss, some of the state's grassland suffered intensely as rainfall diminished. A few stockmen predicted that much of the grass was gone forever, but others were more realistic. A. E. Aldous, an agronomist at Kansas State College, estimated that the grazing capacity of the Flint Hills had decreased 30 to 40 percent by 1935. Aldous said little about the short grass in the central and western parts of the state; but in view of even greater shortages of moisture there, the grazing capacity in these areas must have declined even more, especially after the 1936 drought.

The grass, though sparse, was not dead. A lack of moisture rather than deliberate overgrazing was the basic cause of the poor crop. On the other hand, there were practices that stockmen could readily adopt that would help them not only to replenish the natural vegetation but also to weather the periodic scarcity of rainfall in the future. Various methods of deferred grazing that allowed the grass to reseed itself appeared to work best in the shortgrass areas, although there were attempts to seed buffalo grass artificially in the western part of the state. In this connection and after considerable study, the Ft. Hays Experiment Station concluded that harvesting short-grass seed was impractical. But it could be reseeded by scattering hay that had gone to seed over bare spots. A manure spreader could be used for spreading the cured hay before pressing it into the prepared soil with a packer. Reseeding
The Kansas Beef Industry

seemed to prove more successful with the long grasses of eastern Kansas, however, and here too the hay method was frequently used. By 1938 the *Stockman* reported that 7,563 of the state's cattlemen were deliberately applying a deferred-grazing program; and thousands more, no doubt, were employing the concept to a greater or lesser degree. Ranges could also be protected by distributing salt, water, and feed so that stock would not continually gather in only one area for feeding. Weed and brush control and contour terracing also improved range land. But, even though all of these practices were beneficial, rainfall was most important. When sufficient rain fell, the grass that had become largely dormant during the drought began its slow recovery. As early as 1938 the *Stockman* noted that the bluestem was coming back in many Flint Hills areas. In 1946 Kling L. Anderson reported to the Board of Agriculture, "Many [acres] once thought to be destroyed, now have a cover of grass nearly equal to that before the dry years." Nature and intelligence had contrived this great change, which disproved many ominous predictions that had been made along the way.37

The drought also motivated farmers and ranchers to construct more ponds. These were intended to conserve available water and store it for future use, reduce soil erosion, and provide more stock-watering locations. If stock gathered at only one place for water, the grass was destroyed by their frequent trampling. John R. Brinkley, the colorful doctor who claimed to restore virility with his goat-gland operation, and a part-time politician, was one of the first Kansans to suggest wholesale pond building at public expense. But pond building was not significantly expanded until government agencies became involved in work relief.38

Pond building was also encouraged by government officials and various state and federal conservation agencies. Governor Alf Landon, for example, was a strong advocate of pond construction and encouraged it at every opportunity. Early in his first term as governor he persuaded the legislature to grant a tax reduction to those farmers or ranchers who constructed water-conserving dams. Then, motivated by his concern for water conservation and by the desire to "pry more relief money from the federal government," Landon held a special conference on Kansas water problems in 1934. Detailed plans for 50,000 ponds—along with designs for numerous large lakes for storage and for flood control—were submitted to the federal government. It was soon announced that Kansas would begin receiving half a million dollars a month for construction. Some of the larger, more expensive projects were shelved;
but a year later KERC was supervising the building of 2,391 ponds and 26 lakes.39

The number of ponds and windmills that were constructed in Kansas during the thirties is still a matter of speculation. Various agencies sometimes gave progress reports on their individual efforts; but these were only partial lists at best, and no one seems to have included the numerous individual efforts of farmers and ranchers that were unrelated to any of the government relief projects. One of the best estimates, however, indicated that at least 7,000 dams, pits, and ponds had been constructed by 1940. Conservationist groups encouraged the erection of additional windmills to provide more water and help distribute stock more evenly over the range land. Several relief agencies provided much of the labor and money for many new wells constructed during the thirties. But the figures for new wells are as speculative as those for ponds.40

The Morton County Land Utilization Project was another government attempt at conservation that affected Kansas cattle producers. Morton County, located in the far southwest corner of the state, usually has about seventeen inches of annual precipitation, but during the thirties rainfall dropped to around eleven inches. Dust storms and soil erosion naturally followed, and the government acted. Land purchases in Morton County began under the Resettlement Administration in 1935, at which time 53,590 acres were bought. Rehabilitation began immediately, principally through efforts to arrest the blowing sand. In 1938 an additional 42,800 acres were acquired under the authority of the Bankhead-Jones Act. Other purchases and exchanges followed until the project included almost 107,000 acres of sandhill land on both sides of the Cimarron River, or about 23 percent of the county. The project has remained pretty much the same size up to the present.

Under supervision of the federal Soil Conservation Service—the project has been administered by the Forest Service as a National Grassland since 1954—the area was reseeded to grass and developed for pasturing. By 1943 some of the land was judged sufficiently recovered to allow grazing, and less than a decade later the whole area was being utilized as pasture. The land was leased to the Morton County Grazing Association—formed in 1944 specifically to handle this project—then subleased to members of the association, with some 25 percent of the grazing fees being allocated to the county in lieu of taxes. The association handled many of the routine administrative duties, decided on the number of stock each member was allowed to pasture, and provided range riders, salt, and fences. The Forest Service, however,
The Kansas Beef Industry
determined the grazing fees, the length of the grazing season, and the total
number of animals allowed on the land.

Under the expert management of George S. Atwood, the Forest Service's
representative for almost twenty-five years, this cooperative effort by the
government and local stockmen was an unqualified success in returning much
of the land to high productivity. More rainfall during the forties, of course,
was also instrumental. Stockmen in the area have generally approved the
project, although they frequently disagreed with what they considered to be
unnecessarily low limits on the numbers of stock allowed to graze, or com­
plained of a short pasturing season.41

Thus cattlemen have demonstrated their interest in conservationist prac­
tices throughout the twentieth century, sometimes reluctantly, and often only
with the encouragement and leadership of government. Yet the controversy
over the cattlemen as conservationist continues. The fact that almost all
the land in the state is privately owned accounts in large part for the environ­
mental concerns of Kansas stockmen. This is not to say that Kansans did
not learn and profit from the extensive government efforts at conservation,
especially after the droughts of the thirties focused much attention on the
matter. Most of them did profit, and not a few of the younger stockmen
probably appreciated for the first time the delicate balance that must be struck
between nature and human activity. Many learned the necessity of adapting
to the environment. With nature's cooperation, the government's encoura­
ment, and their own unquenchable optimism, they became not only better
conservationists but better cattlemen as well.42

Throughout the New Deal period there was always some disagreement among
the state's cattlemen on the methodology of individual projects sponsored by
the government. The same discord was apparent when cattlemen discussed
government aid as a single concept, a practice that became increasingly popular
as the New Deal wore on. Most Kansas cattlemen welcomed the government’s
efforts in their behalf, although there were a few who maintained that the
agricultural sector had no room for government subsidies.

Dan Casement, noted earlier for his opposition to government involve­
ment during the twenties, exemplified opposition to New Deal programs
better than anyone else in the state. Sent by his parents to Princeton, where
he learned individualism and self-reliance, Casement then went to western
Colorado to graze cattle and incidentally to illegally fence in some of the
public domain. Eventually he became the most widely known Kansas cattleman in the nation. More has probably been written by and about Casement than any other stockman in the state. Unparalleled success in the show ring with his feeder stock, wide appeal as a public speaker, and his undaunted willingness to say what was on his mind largely accounted for his popularity. Casement also had a charismatic personality. Equally at home in the farrowing pen or the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria, the Manhattan stockman had a wide circle of friends. Some said he made an art of profanity. He was, for example, fond of calling a person with whom he disagreed a “prismatic S.O.B.,” which translated into “a son of a bitch from any angle one cared to look at him.” Some of his other well-chosen vocabulary was unprintable.

Casement, with his brightly colored vests, fashionably tailored jackets, and ever-present pipe, was usually at the major stock shows and other gatherings of stockmen, spewing his feedlot philosophy to all who cared to listen. He was equally comfortable with Thomas Jefferson’s agricultural fundamentalism and Andrew Carnegie’s Social Darwinism, changing his message little throughout his life. Speaking at a meeting of the American National, for example, Casement told cattlemen, “You do not represent a business system or a political organization. You are a social class, typifying a way of life, a fraternity of ideals, that preserve the best in American lore, that unify in a single code of citizenship the traditions of our forefathers for freedom, independence, opportunity, resourcefulness, and rugged individuality.”

This was the same simplistic message that Casement dispensed for three decades. Shortly after AAA went into effect, for instance, Casement wired Secretary Wallace that the new program had caused hog prices to decline almost a dollar in five days. The program, he said in the wire, “is universally condemned by leading farmers and supported only by professional farm leaders in whom real farmers place no trust. It is axiomatic,” he continued, “that neither the laws of nature, economics nor evolution can be repealed by human agencies. Your program aims at the impossible. . . .”43 There was no acceptable method to regulate production, he believed, and to attempt to do so “spells the suicide of democracy,” while “to do so by force would invite revolution.”

Casement believed further that producing food was “the foundation of our national economy, the base on which the whole structure should rest, the center from which all of its elements should radiate.” In answer to New Deal plans that attempted to help the poor farmers and stockmen, Casement replied, in excellent Carnegie fashion, that “poverty and underprivilege are ordained
by the law of life and vital to its design. No human authority can ever abolish them." The solution, he said, was not government aid but rather "an un-speakably slow attrition." Depressed farmers and ranchers were happy to believe that agriculture was the most important sector of the nation's economy, but they were not sure they agreed with the ideas of inevitable poverty and necessary attrition. 44

Casement was not merely an armchair philosopher, content to damn the New Deal from afar. He also had the courage of his convictions. In 1935 the ultraconservative Farmers Independent Council of America was formed, ostensibly to disseminate among farmers accurate information concerning agricultural ills and the true intents of the AAA. Although the council was established primarily by Stanley F. Morse, Casement became the president of this agrarian counterpart of the American Liberty League, and he did as much as anyone to advertise the organization's views. The council thought even Alf Landon was too liberal for its full support in the 1936 election, and the Roosevelt landslide dealt the council a mortal blow. While it continued to exist for a time, it never became the large movement of farmers in revolt against government aid that its founders had envisioned. Eventually the council died, "having become little more than it had been in the beginning, a propaganda organ for industry, the meat packers, and some large cattle interests." 45

Casement, like most of those he represented, carefully selected the government interventions upon which he heaped abuse. Little if any opposition from Casement or any others was expressed toward high protective tariffs for cattlemen, the millions of dollars of public money that the USDA spent to improve the cattle industry, or the various laws that regulated for the producers' benefit the businesses that were tangential to beef production. Nor did Casement see any inconsistency in his beliefs and the relatively low fees that he and others paid to graze cattle on the public lands of the West. 46

Although Casement never altered his views on government aid throughout his long association with the Kansas cattle industry, the views of hundreds of others were not at all consistent, nor were they in line with those of the Manhattan feeder. As noted above, government aid did not come to cattlemen against their will; stockmen demanded help and at the time were usually appreciative of it. The methods and extent of government attempts to aid agriculture were, however, sometimes criticized. Mercer, for instance, remarked at one time that the New Deal was like the farmer who had "too much hay down," and the Stockman once published this ditty:
Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn
There's a government agent counting your corn;
Another one lecturing the old red sow
On the number of pigs she can have and how.

Although some criticized the methods, few were critical of the principle of aid itself. KLA president W. H. Burke, for instance, noted in 1935 that one could get few farmers and ranchers in central and western Kansas excited about opposing government help, as the AAA "has provided a great many of them with the only incomes they have had in the last three years. Their bonus checks have been the only money they have had for food and shoes."

Later the same year Burke chided two of the most prominent members of the Farmers Independent Council by noting that he would shortly visit Charles Collins, who now opposed government aid in all forms, where he would price calves at 8 cents a pound, "a similar crop of which he [Collins] could not sell for half the money before the government, under the AAA, bought at fair prices, some 8 million surplus cattle." Burke then reported that he would also stop at Dan Casement's farm to see his large pig crop, "made possible by his personal sacrifice in refusing to sign a control program, now selling at 10 cents per pound." Dan was a fine host, Burke said, and he would "not remind him that a previous crop of pigs, before the government reduced the surplus was begging for a buyer at 3 cents per pound." R. J. Laubengoyer, another Kansas stockman, told the KLA convention in 1938, "I practiced so-called rugged individualism in farming and ranching until I discovered that it was useless to buck a braced game." Most other business and labor groups, he said, were being subsidized in one way or another.47

Joe Mercer probably best summarized the thinking of most agricultural producers in the state during his unsuccessful bid for the United States Senate in 1932. Mercer traveled the state telling his listeners,

I am not an advocate of government in business, yet as I study the situation it does appear that the true function of government is in serving its citizens in acute emergencies by directing its business affairs so as to prevent unnecessary suffering and property loss. . . . Government alone can direct in controlling production . . . control credits and prevent wild speculation . . . stop bank failures. . . . How unnecessary and ridiculous it is for millions of our citizens to tramp the streets, hungry, poorly clad and cold, looking for means of

251
The Kansas Beef Industry

livelihood, because we have too much food, too much wool and cotton and too much fuel.\textsuperscript{18}

Although willing to demand and accept aid during the thirties, a number of Kansas stockmen soon forgot the position they had taken during the depressed interwar period. Judging by the popular literature that emanates from the industry today, many cattlemen talk as if they are opposed to government aid, and some even believe that this sentiment is based on a long tradition. Well-chosen elements of Casement’s philosophy, for example, are honored today by many as typical of the views cattlemen have always had toward government support. At a KLA convention in 1950 cattlemen yielded to the general hysteria that was characteristic of the times and proudly adopted a “Freedom Resolution” that condemned the “socialized state.” In a supporting statement the Stockman waxed eloquent in its description of the conventioneers, referring to cattlemen who “disdained the dole” as “those men who take their winnings and their losings in stride [like the] pioneers who made America great. . . . They asked no favors . . . those cowmen, who are the bravest, most rugged individualists, the most forthright characters to band together.”\textsuperscript{49}

Ten years after adopting the Freedom Resolution, the Stockman continued to beat the same drum. Under the heading “Livestock Producers Don’t Like Government Help,” the journal intoned again, “Historically the cattle business has been through repeated experience of boom and bust coinciding with the ups and downs of the cattle cycle. At times it might seem pleasant for the cattlemen to unload these problems onto the taxpaying public. But cattlemen have a long and proud history of insisting upon carrying their own problems of natural and economic hazards.”\textsuperscript{50}

Thus, the myth of complete independence and self-reliance, which had been generated long before and perpetuated by men like Casement, persisted beyond the middle of the twentieth century. In reality, as the interwar period revealed, it was a strange position for the livestock sector in view of its generally advantageous relationship with government at both the state and national levels. It is probable that opposition to government aids increased during the prosperous World War II period, but prior to that many successful—and unsuccessful—attempts were made by the government to assist producers of beef. And these came, largely, at the request of farmers and ranchers. Nor was the producer through asking for help when he managed
to get aid for the production phase of the industry. Petitions for government regulation of marketing institutions and transportation were also on his crowded agenda between the wars.
This page intentionally left blank