

1926–1935

Building the Agriculture Community

The decade from 1926 through 1935 was a watershed in American history — especially its agricultural history. The post–World War I Roaring Twenties convulsed into the Great Depression, bringing hardship, unemployment, and enormous personal loss and difficulty to all. Prices of farm produce collapsed, even as production expanded. Agriculture became mechanized, leaving behind subsistence farming and the legacy of the 40-acre farmstead, considered adequate for a family in the 1800s. Federal regulation of farm production and commodity prices became a new reality as President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. Considered the first farm bill, it was part of Roosevelt’s New Deal. County Extension agents became the field force for carrying out the New Deal farm programs, aiding families in ever-larger numbers. By 1938, however, the county agents’ role had changed to that of adviser for New Deal programs.

Between 1925 and 1935, the Texas farm population increased from 2.236 million to 2.369 million, while the number of farms rose from 466,000 to 501,000 and the average farm and ranch size grew from 236 acres to 275 acres. In those same years, despite the increased size of the unit, the average value of farm properties declined 20 percent. As tractor manufacturers brought new, more capable models to the market, however, farmers quickly replaced horse-drawn plows with this faster, more efficient machinery. Expenditures for farm tractors almost doubled, from \$549,000 to \$1.048 million. Farm receipts for cotton and for food and feed grains declined almost 60 percent during the decade, and receipts for livestock generally experienced a 20 percent reduction. Federal emergency farm relief agencies such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration



ABOVE: Power take-off combine increases harvest to 30 acres a day, 1927.

RIGHT: Inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933



1926



Texas A&M celebrates its 50th anniversary. During the celebrations, Thomas O. Walton, former director of the Extension Service, is inaugurated president of the college.

October 16, 1926

April 1926

The Experiment Station releases a bulletin that identifies the cotton fleahopper as more destructive than the boll weevil and presents an integrated control system incorporating insecticide use with tillage and harvest methods.

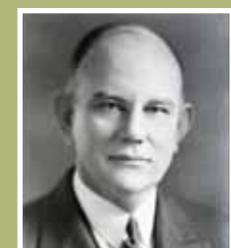




Photo: Architect of the Capitol



The Texas Home Demonstration Clubs Association is formed statewide.

1926

The Texas Forest Service establishes Texas's first tree nurseries in the state forests at Kirbyville and Conroe to sell seedlings to private timberland owners for reforestation.

1926

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Jessie Whitacre is appointed as chief of Rural Home Research, beginning the Experiment Station's research of food preparation and preservation and rural nutritional practices. Whitacre carried out her research on the diets of the poor rural people of Texas through the 1950s.



1926

The State Department of Forestry is renamed the Texas Forest Service, and it becomes one of the four divisions of A&M College.



began to limit production while supporting farm prices at parity levels. Among other Depression-era programs were the Farm Credit Administration (farm mortgages and cooperative loans), the Farm Security Agency (loans to tenant farmers), and the Rural Electrification Administration (electric cooperative loans).

Farming as a way of life transitioned to farming as agribusiness. Agricultural research made great strides during this period, developing disease-resistant plants and livestock and taking early steps toward cloning. Agricultural experiment stations nationwide began a closer research partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bringing more resources and manpower to projects. Extension and forestry also increased efficiency and productivity during this decade. As the Texas Agricultural Extension Service's home demonstration movement became more popular, the clubs formed a statewide association in 1926. The Texas Forest Service became part of the A&M College in 1926 and established the state's first tree nurseries to help landowners with reforestation. In the midst of the Depression, the Forest Service would put young men to work building fire lanes, roads, bridges, and camp facilities in the state forests as part of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Beginning in 1932, after much of the Southern Great Plains grasslands had been plowed for crops — and following a period of prolonged drought, high temperatures, and high winds — devastating dust storms struck the Texas Panhandle, along with farming regions of surrounding states, in what became known as the Dust Bowl, destroying crops and property and damaging animal and human health. In 1934, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Soil Erosion Service established the Dalhart Wind Erosion Control Project in the northern Panhandle. Cattlemen received \$525 million for emergency feed loans and to compensate for lost stock. Farmers desperate for income were employed to build ponds and reservoirs or plant trees to provide windbreaks. They also received seed loans for new crops and were paid to plow soil ridges against the wind. In 1935 the USDA Soil Conservation Service replaced the Soil Erosion Service and opened a regional office in



Top: Severely eroded farmland during the Dust Bowl era, 1930s



Above: Lamar County farmer Donald Cothren working on farm records, 1934

Right: A&M College campus, 1931

The Texas Forest Service initiates a program that provides fire protection services to landowners who agree to an annual assessment based on acreage.

1927



Photo: U.S. Library of Congress

1927

The Department of Agricultural Economics is divided into four departments — and then recombined into one in 1933.



October 24, 1929

The Great Depression begins with the stock market crash. Farm prices and income decline sharply. Unemployment climbs from 1.5 million to over 12 million by 1932.



Plant pathologist G. H. Godfrey announces that chloropicrin, a chemical used on the battlefields during World War I, kills damaging plant parasitic nematodes and soil fungi. This compound has since had a great economic impact as a soil fumigant, allowing farmers to grow crops where pathogens once made it impossible.

1930



Enrollment at Texas A&M declines by 500 students. Room rent in campus dormitories is lowered from \$30 to \$15 per semester to help students continue their studies.

Fall 1931



1930

USDA agencies take over the role of county Extension agents in verification of herd reduction during the Great Depression; this leads to the removal of Extension from any regulatory role.



Amarillo. There, the conservation work for the entire Dust Bowl was carried out, with the cooperation of other federal agencies and state extension services. In 1935 the Texas legislature established conservation districts for wind-erosion control in nine Panhandle counties, and local authorities pressed farmers to take measures to stop the blowing dust. Between 1935 and 1937, over 34 percent of Panhandle farmers left the region.

Things looked better on the Texas A&M College home front during this decade. As a practical, land-grant college education became increasingly significant, reduced fees and cooperative student housing enabled more students to attend Texas A&M. Enrollment, which had fallen during World War I, grew rapidly in the 1920s, declined sharply in the early 1930s, and then began growing again. In the decade of poverty, Texas A&M began to prosper.

Texas A&M and The University of Texas had been greatly enriched by the discovery of oil on university lands in 1923. The Permanent University Fund's resources available for higher education expanded, even as student enrollment faltered. Faculty and staff experienced a 25 percent salary reduction, but Texas A&M spent far more on building and capital improvements in this decade than had been expended during the previous 50 years. New agriculture facilities were built, including the Animal Industries Building and the Agricultural Engineering Building (now Scoates Hall). The Agriculture Building and the Poultry Husbandry Building had been erected during the previous decade. As of August 31, 1925, Texas A&M had 69 permanent buildings on the campus, valued at \$3.5 million. Ten years later, the college had 109 permanent structures, valued at \$8 million. Texas A&M added 150 acres of land to the main campus with the purchase of an adjoining tract from William C. Boyett. Some 6,000 acres had been added to A&M properties as a whole.



ABOVE: Construction of the Animal Industries Building

RIGHT: Dust storm approaching Stratford in the northern Texas Panhandle, April 1935



1931

Fred Hale, chief of the Swine Division at the Experiment Station and later professor in the Department of Animal Science, demonstrates that congenital malformation in piglets could be caused by vitamin A deficiency in sows. His research was widely cited in new studies of nutritional effects on mammalian embryos.

The Texas A&M School of Agriculture becomes the largest in the nation.

1932



1932

Animal husbandry researchers R. O. Berry (above) and Bruce Warwick lay the foundation for cloning as they complete the first successful ovo-transplantation in sheep.



“Had it not been for the local Extension agents, my family would not have survived [the Great Depression]. Profound experiences like these persuaded many young people to view Extension as a noble calling. Local Extension agents were revered and became role models.”

— Dan Pfannstiel, Ph.D.
Director Emeritus, Texas Agricultural Extension Service,
and Professor Emeritus, College of Agriculture and
Life Sciences

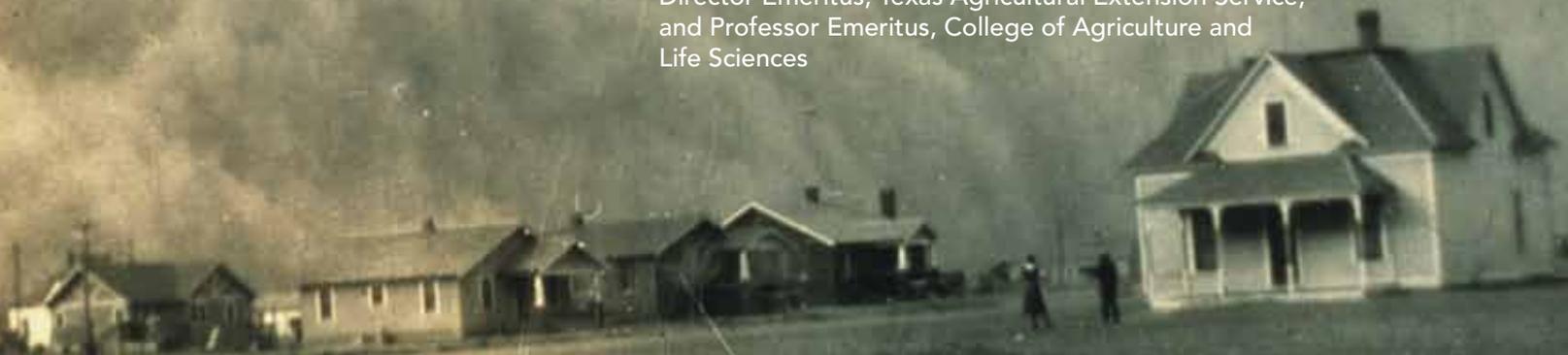


Photo: NOAA George E. Marsh Album

Some 1,800 Texas Home Demonstration Clubs Association members march on the Capitol in Austin to support continued funding for agricultural extension and home demonstration agents.

1933

Texas A&M begins a substantial building program, supported in part by federal relief funds and by the Permanent University Fund.

1933



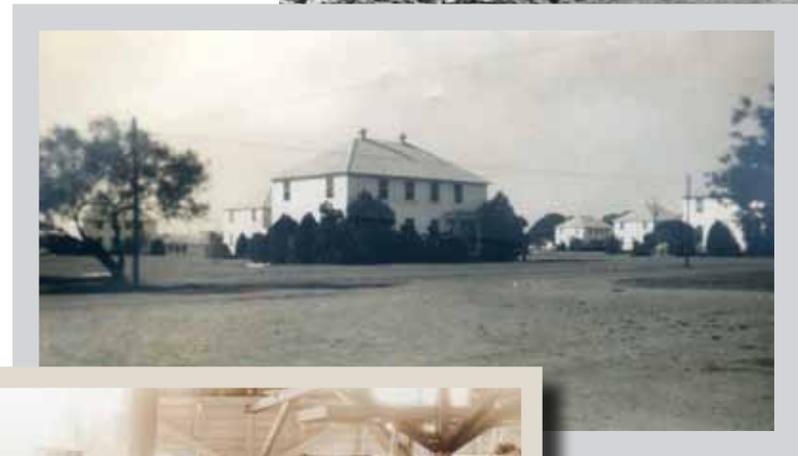
1933

Texas A&M's board of directors approves a 25 percent salary cut for all employees, faculty, and staff during the hard times of the Great Depression.

1933

The 43rd Texas Legislature authorizes the purchase of Texas land by the federal government to establish national forests.

Enrollment more than doubled over the decade, from 2,379 at the beginning of the 1925–1926 academic year to 4,915 for the 1936–1937 academic year. The burgeoning enrollment created the need for “tent cities” and “Hollywood shacks” on the campus for temporary housing. The faculty totaled 183 in 1925–1926, half of whom had no advanced degree. Ten years later the faculty had more than doubled, and 81 percent held an advanced degree, with 20 percent of the total faculty holding a Ph.D.



TOP RIGHT: Rural sociology professor Daniel Russell initiated Project Houses on campus in 1932. Students lived economically by doing their own cleaning and cooking and purchasing food in bulk or bringing it from home, instead of eating in the mess hall. The Cooperative Movement, supported by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, became a statewide phenomenon.

TOP LEFT: Extension agents helped Texans transition from family farming to agribusiness. Mrs. O. M. Polk of Houston marketed an average of 50 dozen eggs per week, 1930.

BOTTOM: Participants in 1933 Extension farmers' short course make sorgo syrup using easily made equipment.



Congress approves the Agricultural Adjustment Act (known as the first farm bill), initiating voluntary agreements with farmers to reduce crop acreage in return for cash advances for crops stored on the farm and guaranteed parity prices for farm produce.

1933



Photo: NOAA NWS Collection

1933

Experiment Station horticulturists at Weslaco begin an onion-breeding program to develop varieties better adapted to South Texas (the program was expanded in 1939, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture). Texas A&M College officially releases the 'Texas Early Grano' onion (also called Grano 502), the mother of all sweet onions in the world.



1934

Texas public forestry work and forest-related recreational facilities expand in cooperation with Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) programs. The Texas Forest Service directs 17 CCC camps (with the prefix "P"), with 3,800 young men building fire lanes, roads, bridges, telephone lines, fire towers, and camp facilities.



Texas A&M and the Texas Poultry Industry

Poultry and eggs, formerly homegrown and home-consumed products, became commercial agribusiness commodities in the era between World Wars I and II. Texas A&M organized a poultry husbandry department in 1910, later named the Department of Poultry Science, which, along with Texas Agricultural Extension Service poultry specialists, fostered the emergence of the modern Texas poultry industry. Texas produces some 7.3 million turkeys, 4.7 billion broilers, and 4.7 billion eggs for consumption every year, with an economic impact of approximately \$2 billion. All poultry products placed in retail stores are USDA tested, and production and disease oversight is also maintained by the Department of Poultry Science, which emphasizes research in environmental stewardship, product quality and safety, and avian and human health. Since the 1970s, another Texas A&M AgriLife component, the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory, has played a critical role in maintaining the health of the poultry industry through rapid diagnosis of poultry diseases. Texas A&M poultry scientists also discovered that hens fed a modest amount of flaxseed, fish oil, or microalgae would produce eggs with omega-3 fatty acid content similar to a serving of fish. Omega-3 eggs have become widely popular as part of a healthy diet.

Storm-proof cotton research begins at the Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Lubbock. Scientist Don Jones's work leads to the development of a strain of cotton that will not fall from the burr during high winds, heavy rains, and hail. This cotton ultimately transformed the Southern High Plains from a ranching economy into a farming economy and influenced worldwide cotton production.

1934



June 29, 1935

The Bankhead-Jones Agricultural Research Act increases federal funding for extension work and requires states to match these funds.

The citizens of Houston County give the Mission State Forest, site of the San Francisco de los Tejas Mission, to the Texas Forest Service. Civilian Conservation Corps workers help develop it as a historical site in time for the Texas Centennial celebration in 1936.

The site was transferred to the State Parks Board in 1957 and renamed Mission Tejas State Park.

1935

