Abstract

During the twentieth century, tobacco farmers in rural North Carolina quietly changed the relationship between the government and citizen in America. Flue-cured tobacco growers produced not only the finest cigarette leaf, but also new systems of marketing, regulating, and talking about their crop. This dissertation follows the ambitions and achievements of tobacco farmers during the height of the cigarette’s popularity, 1920-1965. From being buffeted about a marketplace they barely understood, let alone controlled, producers of flue-cured tobacco ultimately came to define, expand, and defend a global market for their crop. They did so, I argue, by becoming a part of the government. I characterize the tobacco economy as corporatist—a term more frequently and comfortably invoked to describe state-society interaction in Europe and Latin America. This framing suggests vocabulary through which we might understand American political economy, the power of producers in the era of the consumer, and the persistence of regionalism in the Sunbelt.

“Little Tobacco: The Business and Bureaucracy of Tobacco Farming, 1920-1965” takes farmers’ own organizations as its primary focus. Through sources that capture what historian Anthony Badger has described as the “topsoil” of active farmers, this dissertation seeks, on one level, to understand how farmers sought control of their economic horizons. They became incorporated into the government through the New Deal’s policy of acreage-reduction, which farmers themselves ratified and administered. Farmers were then able to use such administrative empowerment to expand the market for their crop, courting foreign buyers. Finally, as the cigarette began to face increasing medical scrutiny, tobacco growers assumed a defensive posture, rhetorically distancing themselves from industry even as their economic interests drew
them closer. The tripartite structure of this dissertation maps onto the evolving organizational abilities of tobacco farmers, with particular attention to how they understood the tobacco manufacturers and the federal government. On another level, therefore, this dissertation gives voice to how farmers viewed themselves and their relationship to government, consumers, other economic sectors, and knowledge-producing institutions. I conclude that farmers’ unique position betwixt and between the government and private interest groups allowed them to speak with the prestige and authority of the insider, but in the defiant tones of the outsider—a particularly effective rhetorical mix that I term “the politics of umbrage.”
Acknowledgements

A farmer might call this “settlin’-up time”—the moment when, after the harvest is prized, weighed and sold, the farmer still finds herself indebted to her creditors. I cannot “pay out” the many debts I’ve accumulated to my mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. The most I can do is publicly announce my gratitude. And, at any rate, such expression more befits the absolutely non-transactional spirit in which all help as been given.

First and most emphatic thanks go to Kevin Kruse. More than just my dissertation advisor, Kevin has been an outstanding mentor and guide to the profession. A lightning-fast email correspondent, and thoughtful, thorough reader (sometimes perhaps too thorough, especially on those footnotes), Kevin has also been a living example of generosity. His lively engagement with my work, particularly during the early stages of writing, helped sustain my confidence, and stoked my enthusiasm. Kevin’s upbeat approach toward everything he does—to my mind, his fundamental respect for his students and colleagues—is a model I hope to emulate.

Dan Rodgers had the greatest influence upon me during my most formative years of schooling since kindergarten. I will forever have a good little Dan-angel on my shoulder prodding me to disaggregate my terms: “What is America?” “Who is a farmer?” That is to say, Dan has fundamentally changed my subjectivity. It is not possible for me to read a text, write a sentence, view a cultural artifact, or even be in a scholarly setting without fixating on questions of power and discourse that Dan turned me on to years ago. This is neither thanks nor praise, but in so far as I am a scholar, it is because of Dan.

I was lucky enough to empress Keith Wailoo onto my committee, and even luckier to watch him lead the History of Science colloquium for a semester. His relentless attention to the
politics of knowledge production made me feel like less of an outsider to the subfield. I speak on behalf of anybody who has heard me present recently when I give Keith special thanks for his impromptu tutorial on effective use of Powerpoint for multi-disciplinary audiences. I was fortunate enough to get to know my outside reader, Meg Jacobs, during my last year of graduate school. While her work has inspired my own reflections on the human side of bureaucracies, what I’m most grateful for are her job market-related pep talks during a particularly stressful time.

For the past few years, Dirk Hartog and Jon Levy have always made me feel like I could be more than who I was. They listened to my thoughts, however half-baked or incomplete, and in listening and questioning they helped me find my own voice. More than that, though, they have been constant reminders that what we get to do for a living—lecturing, writing, pontificating, and sometime just bloviating—is damn fun. I will miss the easy proximity of these conversations. Before I got to Princeton, Margot Minardi, herself then a graduate student at Harvard, helped me make the choice to go to graduate school and become an historian. Just before I graduated college she told me she thought that I would “actually enjoy the experience.” Her wryly-stated opinion inspired just enough confidence in me to help me through my first semester at Princeton, and her subsequent advice has continued to help me along the way.

I’ve been lucky enough to benefit from the counsel, work-related and otherwise, of a number of scholars at Princeton. Margot Canaday and Julian Zelizer have been particularly generous with their time. And I can’t say enough about how much I enjoyed my time as an interloper in the weekly History of Science colloquium. Angela Creager, Erika Milam, and Michael Gordin made Monday afternoons rigorously enjoyable.
A number of dedicated people inside Dickinson and McCosh Halls have made Princeton an easy place to negotiate. Thanks especially to Reagan Campbell, Lauren Kane, and Kristy Novak for their patient and prompt responses to emails sent in states of confusion and invariably up against a deadline. Judith Ferzst and Candice Kessel made all aspects of my participation in the Program in American Studies pleasant.

I’ve also been fortunate enough to have been helped by many scholars outside Princeton. I’ve received wonderful feedback from commenters and audiences at meetings of the Agricultural History Society, Southern Historical Association, and Environmental History Society. Special thanks are due to Pete Daniel, for putting me in touch with people and sources in North Carolina and at the National Archives. Robert Proctor, Elizabeth Brake, and Claire Strom have provided especially helpful comments along the way.

Now the hard part. It is difficult to express my gratitude to a group of people who are simultaneously friends and colleagues, razor-sharp and tender. It’s not in vogue to admit this, but I have had a wonderful time in graduate school at Princeton. Henry Cowles, Rohit De, Will Deringer, Catherine Evans, Chris Florio, Evan Hepler-Smith, Jennifer Jones, Zack-Kagan Guthrie, Jessica Lowe, Padraic Scanlan, Will Schultz, Sarah Seo, Anne Twitty, and Dov Weinryb Grohsgal have all helped me write this dissertation. In particular, Henry, Will and Evan have been helpful, hilarious guides to the history of science. Rohit, Jessica and Sarah have tolerated my questions, no doubt incorrectly formulated, about legal history and the law. I am very indebted to Melissa Teixeira, with whom I had an eleventh-hour conversation that helped me clarify my thoughts on corporatism. Finally, I’ve shared no greater number of intellectual experiences at Princeton with anyone other than Ronny Regev. I would not want this any other way.
People at Princeton and elsewhere have helped me write this dissertation in other ways as well. Kelly Swartz and Rebecca O’Brien have been a wonderful friends and confidantes. Mile-by-mile, sentence-by-sentence, and ounce-by-ounce, Margaret Schotte has helped me get this thing written. For so many years now, Jessie Greenberg has always known what to say and which emails to forward. And Margaret Ho has encouraged me through this whole process—occasionally even lending her skills as a professional copywriter. Meredith Sadin, my once-and-future roommate, has been a constant source of humor and perspective. The entire Laffan clan has been like a second family to me—only more bike-crazy and more Australian. Thanks are especially due to Mike for his superhuman ability to detect a mechanical (and human) error on a bike, and to Judy for tolerating my midmorning requests for rides.

My biggest accomplishment in graduate school is not having written a dissertation. Not even close. It’s been finding Kyrill, and getting him to stick around. The first part wasn’t hard: we met the first week of graduate school and were in the same departmental cohort. The second part I can only attribute to serendipity and a shared love of dogs. Kyrill knows that he has helped me write the dissertation—talking through ideas, inspiring my own discipline through his work ethic, and reading copy. But what he doesn’t know—what he absolutely cannot know—is how very much his love and humor have propelled me, and made me want to do whatever it is that I do.

Finally, my most humble and deeply-felt thanks must go to my family. Perhaps to their frequent regret, my parents, David Milov and Elizabeth Estrada, instilled in me a sense that my thoughts mattered, and that thoughts about how to help others mattered the most. Historians are less self-sacrificing than physicians, but my parents’ approach to their own work—a moral imperative to use your good fortune to help others—continues to inspire. Joelle, my sister, oldest
and best friend, has supported me even when she wasn’t sure what I was talking about, or why I seemed so stressed. I feel so fortunate to have entered graduate school at Princeton while she was finishing her undergraduate education here.

At the last, deepest core of myself is my mother. During childhood, she used to tell me that she could feel good news “in her bones,” and just hearing her say those words made me feel it too. I still look to her for wisdom and guidance, but now I am wise enough myself to be in awe of her resilience, strength, and humility. It does not exactly make sense to dedicate a dissertation as some kind of paltry recompense for a mother’s love. But it is the best that I can do right now. What follows is for her.
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Introduction:
Looking at Tobacco and Seeing History

In May 2010, I found myself waiting to meet a stranger at a McDonald’s in Cary, North Carolina. As I nursed 32 ounces of Diet Coke, my eyes darted between the restaurant’s two doors, looking for Billy Yeargin. I only had a rough idea of what he might look like, based on an old photo buried deep inside his *Remembering North Carolina Tobacco*. There, he appeared in rolled-up denim overalls holding a pitchfork, his paunch and smile rendering him more American baroque than American gothic.¹ Yet I knew that Yeargin did not spend much of his life farming tobacco. The great agricultural historian Pete Daniel had passed along his name to me without much in the way of explanation. All I knew was that many years ago, the two men had worked on some political campaigns together, and that Yeargin, an amateur historian, might be a talkative resource in the area. His email address, tobhistory@aol.com, made me think that Daniel’s tip had been a very good one.

Once I recognized him, we introduced ourselves, commented on the hot weather, the halfway-between-both-of-us location, and eased into the tobacco talk. Both of us fell into familiar roles: he, the folk professor; I, the approval-seeking graduate student. Over the course of our conversation, I came to learn, among other things, that Yeargin, who had grown up in a family of warehousemen, had worked for some time in Washington at an organization called the Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee. Had I ever heard of it? I had not. For a moment I wondered if this was some sort of a trap. I had seen

Hollywood’s take on Big Tobacco in *The Insider* and *Thank You For Smoking*, and it seemed entirely plausible that I was being tested and that my answer to the question would determine whether or not our conversation would continue. I confessed that I had not heard of the Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee, which turned out to be the right answer. Yeargin had himself only recently deposited the group’s papers at the Duke Homestead Tobacco Farm Life Museum, where he’d also served on the board.

This was more than I could have hoped for: a brand-new archive of a pro-tobacco lobby. After all, much is at stake in tobacco archives. Members of the public health community discovered a new tool of regulation when the internal records of the major tobacco companies were made available online as part of a massive legal settlement. But as the euphoria of “discovery” wore off, I found myself puzzling over other aspects of this encounter. Yeargin had rattled off a dozen names and a half-dozen local institutions that I had never heard of, but that were, he insisted, essential to understanding tobacco farming in the twentieth century. Why was Yeargin so adamant in explaining tobacco not through the romance of the auction house—this was a man who had staged a mock tobacco auction at a recent North Carolina State Fair—but through the quotidian work of farm organizations? And what about those political campaigns that he had been working on? During our conversation the names Jim Hunt and Kay Hagan came up repeatedly. Hunt was a towering figure in North Carolina politics—the state’s longest-serving governor with two non-consecutive reelected terms (1977-1985 and 1993-2001). Both Hunt and Hagan, a U.S. Senator, were Democrats. Based on his age, race, and residence, I had taken Yeargin for a Republican. In fact, based on what I had read about the evasions of Big Tobacco and the anti-government attitudes of southern whites, I thought
“Little Tobacco” would add an anti-regulatory wrinkle to a narrative about the emergence of a Republican-voting Sunbelt south.

My brief encounter with Yeargin suggested that the story would be messier, with fewer recognizable villains than histories of the tobacco industry and the postwar South generally provide. Most traces of the twentieth century tobacco culture are all but gone in North Carolina. The warehouses, the colorful spaces where farmers assembled in the late summer months to sell their crop by auction, are shuttered. In Oxford, North Carolina, Yeargin’s Warehouse has turned to fruit and vegetable auctions. And the unimaginably rapid staccato chant of the tobacco auctioneer—an aural talisman of the old tobacco culture—can now only be heard at re-enactments at state fairs, school events, or at two of North Carolina’s tobacco museums. These hints of a tobacco nostalgia industry challenged me to approach farm organizations with empathy enough to understand the present-day impulse toward memorialization, but also with a healthy dose of materialist skepticism. Did the vision of independent, small-scale (white) family farm production on display at the Duke Homestead Museum, or in Yeargin’s published reminiscences, comport with the archival record? How did these small-scale farmers understand themselves vis-à-vis the big tobacco companies, an expanding federal government, growing public opprobrium for smoking, and a rapidly changing region?

This dissertation, “Little Tobacco: The Business and Bureaucracy of Tobacco Farming in North Carolina, 1920-1975,” tries to answer these questions by following the efforts of tobacco growers to gain control over their economic and political lives. For

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farmers, the meaning of “control” depended on the legal and political tools at their disposal, as well as the broader social, scientific, and economic forces swirling around them. I argue that farmers used their corporatist relationship to the government to produce new systems of marketing, regulating, and talking about their crop. As the most subsidized and contested crop of the twentieth century, tobacco provides privileged access into the relationships between discourse, capitalism, and public policy. The political economy of twentieth-century tobacco production suggests the vital importance of producer organizations in the era of what historian Lizabeth Cohen has called the “Consumer’s Republic,” the persistence of regional economic forms in the era of the Sunbelt, and the complex interrelationship between public and private markets.

I. Flue-Cured Tobacco: A Brief History of a Young Crop

As the cigarette faced scrutiny on health grounds during the latter half of the twentieth century, members of the tobacco industry argued that time itself proved the legitimacy of the crop’s place in American life. Colonial in its New World cultivation, but anti-colonial in its association with Jeffersonian independence, tobacco appeared as part of the natural fabric of American political economy, simultaneously suggesting righteous rebellion and landed gentility. Farmers, businessmen and even public health officials came to engage in this discourse of ahistoric tobacco, each group exempting some aspect of the of the industry from the forces of human contestation.

Disingenuously allaying public fears, spokesmen for the big tobacco companies expressed this as a kind of timeless medical wisdom. “Tobacco has been a popular custom for hundreds of years,” read a confidential briefing paper produced by lawyers for
the Brown & Williamson tobacco company in 1980. “It has given enjoyment and 
pleasure to smokers, has provided employment opportunities for many and has 
contributed to economies of countries throughout the world.”

Attitude surveys 
conducted by tobacco firms suggested that this folk epidemiology resonated with a 
portion of the smoking public. In the words of one respondent to the 1983 questionnaire: 
“People have been smoking for hundreds of years. They didn’t have lung cancer then.”

Tobacco advocates instead emphasized the historical cross borne by the crop and its 
champions. As long as there had been tobacco production, there had been tobacco 
prohibitionists. Contemporary battles over smoking policy were therefore naturalized as 
an inherent part of the crop’s existence. It was as if tobacco itself contained these social 
polarities, regardless of its historical context. What’s more, this neutralized view of 
tobacco’s beleaguered history made it seem like tobacco was itself a victim whose 
resiliency suggested moral strength: always maligned, always in doubt, yet still there.

Tobacco farmers personified the crop, embracing its historical victimhood as their 
own. Growers, too, appealed to history to validate their work, placing their sweated labor 
into an imagined tradition of political and economic struggle. “Now why are so many 
people across these United States criticizin' our tobacco industry? Why do they criticize 
our livelihood?” Sam McLawhorn, Jr., a tobacco farmer and chain smoker, wondered to a 
reporter in 1980. “Cause I like that cigarette I gotta sit in the back seat of that airplane. 
But you can sit in the front seat and drink all the whiskey you want. If that ain't

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discrimination, God do have mercy.”5 Eliding their own identities with that of the cigarette, some tobacco farmers imagined the forces of history—embodied in the present as the government, scientific experts, and a feminized, finger-wagging public—as trying to snuff them out as well. Whether his word choice was deliberate or subconscious, for a chain-smoking, white, southern farm owner to cry “discrimination” at having to sit at the “back seat of that airplane” was suggestive of the depths of farmers’ victimized self-conception—what anthropologist Peter Benson has recently termed “plighted citizenship.” 6

By the time public health officials were openly debating how the nation’s 600,000 tobacco growers fit into federal smoking cessation, the anachronistic view of tobacco cultivation seemed a natural part of the conversation. For John M. Pinney, the head of the federal Office of Smoking and Health, the tobacco farmer of 1980 was a “tragic” figure. These farmers are not immoral at all. They are doing something their forebears have done for 250 years,” Pinney told the Washington Post. “It is a tragedy that they are caught up in one of the great public health problems of our time.”7

These responses—an evocative mix of sentimentality, spin and self-interest—obscured two essential features of the flue-cured tobacco economy: it was young, and farmers were active agents in its construction. As historian Barbara Hahn has recently shown, the flue-cured variety was anything but a historical artifact. “Flue-curing” refers to the painstaking, on-farm process of heating tobacco leaves in wooden barns. These barns required round-the-clock vigilance and expertise in how to administer the heat so as

to produce leaves worthy of the “brightleaf” moniker. As Hahn has shown, flue-cured tobacco is virtually identical to other varieties. On a cellular level, the Burley tobacco grown in Kentucky is indistinguishable from the Turkish tobacco of the Mediterranean; the signature “mild” taste of American-style cigarettes owed nothing to the crop itself. It was instead technology—the mass production of cigarettes, leaf-by-leaf harvesting, the application of heat through ducts in wooden curing barns—that made flue-cured tobacco unique.\(^8\)

Flue-curing, the lore goes, was the result of a happy accident. One rainy evening in 1839, an “intelligent young slave” named Stephen Slade fell asleep on the job.\(^9\) Stephen had been tasked with tending the wood fire used to cure the tobacco cultivated on the plantation of his owner, Abisha Slade. When Stephen awoke, the fire had nearly died; and so, perhaps fearing his master’s wrath, Stephen rushed to the plantation’s nearby blacksmith’s forge, grabbed a bundle of charred logs, tossed them on the


flickering embers, and hoped for the best. At this point in the flue-cured mythology, the romantic racialism (the slave’s ingenious indolence) took a back seat to the hard logic of the market. Abisha Slade took “600 pounds of the brightest yellow tobacco ever seen in Caswell County” to a merchant in Danville, just over the Virginia state line, where it was purchased at four times the average hundredweight price. Abisha Slade and his brothers spent the rest of their lives trying to recreate and promote this tobacco-brightening practice. Crucially, this origin story, even including the twenty years in which the Slade brothers attempted to model bright tobacco to other growers in the Virginia and North Carolina Piedmont, does not explain why the flue-curing barn emerged as the taken-for-granted finishing touch on the harvest.\(^1\) By the turn of the twentieth century, knowing where tobacco was produced meant knowing a host of other useful information: who might want to buy it, where it would be sold, how it would be packaged, what kind of treatment it had received on-farm, how a consumer might ultimately enjoy it. The tobacco produced along the hilly spine of clay soil south of Charlottesville and north of Raleigh would have been recognized as flue-cured, bound for purchase at auctions in Danville (VA), South Boston (VA), or Durham (NC), and from there, likely used in little “cigarets” mechanically produced by the American Tobacco Company monopoly.

Flue-cured tobacco—referred to interchangeably by farmers, businessmen and politicians as “bright leaf tobacco,” “Virginia tobacco,” “cigarette tobacco,” or just “bright tobacco”—became a distinct and stable category of leaf as cigarettes rose in popularity. In the 1920s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) promulgated a

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\(^1\) Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright*, 13-14; For analysis that puts late nineteenth century political economy at the heart of the rise of flue-cured bright leaf tobacco, see Hahn, particularly 101-128. See also Evan P. Bennett, “King Bacca’s Throne: Land, Life, and Labor in the Old Bright Belt Since 1880.” Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 2005.
classification system based on curing method and consumption purpose. During the 1930s, the New Deal’s agriculture policy necessitated a further geographic classification of tobacco order to enforce the policy of supply reduction. In an important development, government policy froze grower production around a “historic base,” stopping further geographic expansion of the weed. The spread of tobacco cultivation beyond the “Old Belt” of the Virginia-Carolina Piedmont was halted only by the acreage restrictions imposed by the agricultural legislation of the New Deal. Despite these limitations, tobacco production soared with the rise of the cigarette, growing from 300 million pounds in the immediate post-bellum years, to over a billion in 1909. These numbers seem altogether puny when stacked against flue-cured production in 1963—the year of peak American cigarette consumption. That year, flue-cured tobacco farmers marketed over 1.3 billion pounds of leaf.

And yet, the scale of tobacco farming remained minuscule in comparison to the consolidated mega-farms and agribusinesses of the responsible for cotton, corn, soybeans and wheat cultivation. As late as 1994, analysts at the USDA considered tobacco a “labor-intensive crop” grown on “small family farms.” When cigarette consumption was peaking in America, tobacco growers cultivated just 3.2 acres on average.

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11 Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright*, 163. See Appendix, Figure 0.1.
16 Ibid., 66. See Appendix, Figure 0.2.
This is not to suggest that tobacco *was actually* produced by casteless white yeomen on farmland so hilly as to render the thousand-acre decadence of the cotton plantation unimaginable. At the turn of the twentieth century, tobacco cultivation spread southeast into the Coastal Plain of North Carolina, transforming that flat, humid, loamy sand region into the anchor of the flue-cured economy. Farms in this “New Belt” of tobacco cultivation tended to be larger than in the Piedmont. The population was more heavily African American, and the percentage of sharecroppers was greater. Equally important, the Coastal Plain also came to house the major marketing centers, the famed auction warehouses, in which tobacco was sold.\(^\text{17}\) Wilson and Greenville competed among each other for the title of largest tobacco auction in the world, until both were overtaken the Boka Tobacco Auction Floors in Harare, Zimbabwe in the late 1990s.\(^\text{18}\)

The physical landscape of tobacco cultivation gave farmers and observers a distinct sense of the crop’s connection to the past. But like any landscape, tobacco’s geography naturalized the hand of man in its construction.\(^\text{19}\) “The 600,000 American families dependent on income from tobacco crops are the single remaining example of the Jeffersonian ideal, a small-farm yeomanry,” wrote one sympathetic policy analyst in

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1981.20 Even today, tobacco is not purely abstractable, standardized, interchangeable; in some ways, it is not fully a commodity at all.21 Unlike wheat or corn or hogs, tobacco has no futures market. The physical examination of tobacco—an assessment of its color, texture, size—was necessary for a firm to place a bid on a grower’s lot. This artisanal element of tobacco cultivation strengthened farmers’ claims as technical experts, and even as yeoman householders in a political economy increasingly given to deskill reproducibility of labor. In a very real sense, tobacco never developed a futures exchange because growers traded in an imagined past.

Part of the reason that tobacco farmers have looked so quaint, so “caught up” in the tragic forces of history, was the overwhelming power, avarice and modernity of the major tobacco firms. Indeed, business historian Alfred Chandler’s foundational Visible Hand detected in the tobacco industry a perfect illustration of his technology-driven account of business development.22 Flue-cured production was tethered to the cigarette; as more Americans smoked, more flue-cured tobacco was cultivated. Farmers were not secondhand observers to smoking. Their active participation in the tobacco industry is an untold story. Perhaps it is also one that resonates with the organized sweated workers whose labor lies beneath the purview of a Washington lobby, but whose image may work on the behalf of an entire trade.

II. Argument and Approach

This dissertation is about organization.\textsuperscript{23} Tobacco farmers began the twentieth century inside the swirl of a chaotic marketplace characterized by extremes—extremes of wealth on the part of tobacco manufacturers, and extremes of ignorance and insecurity among tobacco growers. By the end of the century, however, tobacco growers had such a grasp on the now-infamous tobacco trade that they had erased their own role in creating the “cigarette century.” This dissertation traces the political, cultural and economic transformations that gave rise to such controlled erasure. By examining the economic and cultural sources of meaning within the tobacco economy we might better understand several aspects of American political culture—how, where, and by whom markets get made; how politically privileged Americans understand their own ability to control their

economic destiny; and, perhaps, how historical discourses—in this case, one of agrarian individualism—can serve to obscure structural privilege.

This dissertation is not about tobacco; it is about the institutions that supported, expanded, and defended tobacco production despite a seemingly never-ending series of crises. Put simply, farmers gained control over their economic fortunes by becoming a part of the government. From the New Deal forward, each and every farmer growing flue-cured tobacco in the United States was part of a tightly controlled program of market creation. Their support and administration of the federal tobacco program was essential to its nearly uninterrupted continuation through 1982—the year the tobacco farm program ceased being supported by federal appropriations. The tobacco market was highly regulated: farmers were told where and how much tobacco they could produce; and in exchange for curtailing their production, farmers were guaranteed price minima.24 Farmers liked the tobacco program because it smoothed the bumps of the unpredictable agricultural marketplace. But “regulation”—with its attendant assumptions about principals and agents, and politicized interpretations of “capture” or “inefficiency”—is not the best word to characterize the tobacco economy.25 Rather, I argue that the political

24 Anthony Badger’s Prosperity Road is the definitive account of the formulation and implementation of the federal tobacco program as part of the New Deal. Badger, Anthony J. Badger, Prosperity Road: The New Deal, Tobacco, and North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).
25 Notably, with the recent publication of an edited volume on regulation, as well as a working paper series devoted to “Rethinking Regulation” historians have begun to historicize the process of decision-making within regulatory bodies. As proof of the complicated interrelationship between civil society, bureaucracy, and regulatory knowledge, this nascent historiography of regulation is itself underwritten by the Tobin Project. Edward J. Balleisen and David A. Moss, Government and Markets: Toward a New Theory of Regulation. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David A. Moss, When All Else Fails: Government as the Ultimate Risk Manager (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002). Political scientists working within the subfield of American Political Development have turned toward specific administrative agencies as their subjects, illuminating processes of decisionmaking within them. Thus far, the Food and Drug Administration has been the most studied agency. See Daniel P. Carpenter, The Forging of Bureaucratic
The economy of tobacco production can best be understood as corporatist. Infrequently invoked by historians of the United States, likely because of the word’s close association with interwar fascism, corporatism can be used to describe the state’s institutionalization of organized interest groups or sectors. Political theorists Philippe Schmitter and Wolfgang Streek dub such an arrangement “private interest government.” These “private interests”—what political historians might call civic associations—represent something outside of the organizing models described by pluralist and state-centered explanations of American political development. At the “intersection between the

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tobacco farmers were organized by the state; they used their organization and state support to expand tobacco markets internationally and embed pro-tobacco policies locally. And yet, their straddled stance—inside and outside the government, or, more precisely, part of a hybrid institution for which the American political vocabulary is insufficient—entitled them to the best of both words: the umbrage of an outsider and the entitlement of an insider. Farmers’ imagined independence, moral claim to the Jeffersonian ideal, and a keen sense of their historic underdog status were all articulated with state support.30

But, of course, on another level this dissertation is about tobacco. Tobacco farmers are worth thinking about because of the scientific and legal contestation of the cigarettes during the twentieth century. This study is defined both chronologically and geographically by the cigarette. I focus on North Carolina growers because their flue-cured tobacco preponderantly fills American-style cigarettes. North Carolina was responsible for between 60-70% of flue-cured production, making it possible to speak generally about the political economy of tobacco production while focusing on one state.31 And the rough chronology of the dissertation—1920 to 1975—also reflects the

30 I invoke corporatism to suggest a blurrier organizational interface between “state” and “society” than has generally been suggested by scholars of American political economy. However, scholars of corporatism share a great amount of intellectual space with “historical institutionalists’ approaches to political development. However, even these “state-centered” theorists grant causal primacy to a clearly bounded and defined state that can act upon citizens. Theda Skocpol and Edwin Amenta, “States and Social Policies,” Annual Review of Sociology 12 (1986): 131-157; Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, “State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal,” Political Science Quarterly 97, no. 2 (1982): 255-278; Kenneth Finegold, State and Party in America’s New Deal (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).
supremacy of the cigarette as Americans’ preferred nicotine delivery system. The Surgeon General’s landmark Report on Smoking and Health, released to an American public in which two thirds of all men and a third of all women smoked, was partially responsible for this shift. The 1964 Report stated the grave consequences of cigarettes in no uncertain terms: “cigarette smoking is associated with a 70 percent increase in the age-specific death rates of males, and to a lesser extent with increased death rates of females;” “cigarette smoking is causally related to lung cancer in men; the magnitude of the effect of cigarette smoking far outweighs all other factors;” “it is established that male cigarette smokers have a higher death rate from coronary artery disease than non-smoking males;” “cigarette smoking is a significant factor in the causation of cancer of the larynx.”32 These and other dire findings gave rise to the committee’s judgment in brief: “cigarette smoking is a health hazard of sufficient importance in the United States to warrant appropriate remedial action.”33

More than anything else, the Report was a political document, built to authorize anti-smoking regulations.34 Surgeon General Luther Terry assembled a ten-man scientific panel that met with the approval of both anti-smoking organizations (the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association) and the tobacco industry’s main lobbying arm, the Tobacco Institute. “What Terry sought,” according to historian of science Allan Brandt, “was a political document that was scientifically unimpeachable.”35

33 Bold emphasis in original. Ibid, 33.
35 Idem.
This consensus report, “a major innovation in medicine and public health,” was particularly necessary in developing a health-oriented regulatory regime around tobacco, as the tobacco industry had long relied on “the widespread perception of an ongoing scientific controversy” to forestall such regulation.\(^{36}\) Historians of science call this deliberate production of ignorance “agnotology.” Ignorance—in this instance, ignorance of the extent of the individual and social risks posed by smoking—is not the result of incapacity or passivity toward knowledge. Robert Proctor contends that ignorance should be considered an active state—a state “made, maintained, and manipulated by means of certain arts and sciences,” such as the tobacco industry’s insistence that the case against tobacco had yet to be proven. “The call for ‘more research’ to slow the threat of regulation,” Proctor writes, “must rank as one of the greatest triumphs of corporate connivance.”\(^{37}\)

The courts have recently echoed this scholarly assessment. In *USA v. Philip Morris et al.* (2006), District of Columbia District Judge Gladys Kessler found the industry in violation of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, citing Big Tobacco’s half-century record of deceit. Judge Kessler’s nearly 1,700-page ruling was a condemnation of the industry’s “coordinated, well-financed, sophisticated public relations campaign to attack and distort the scientific evidence demonstrating the relationship between smoking and disease.”\(^{38}\) This was a judgment based on tobacco’s longstanding history of scientific denial. Judge Kessler echoed the arguments contained within the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), which had transformed industry

\(^{36}\) Brandt, *Cigarette Century*, 218.


fraud into a tool of public health regulation. As part of the Settlement, a trove of secret
industry documents has been opened for public use. Until 2021, tobacco companies are
required to make electronically available all documents recovered through litigation that
relate to smoking and health.

These “secret industry documents” have provided the basis for most of what
scholars know about the inner-workings of tobacco companies, particularly the industry’s
relationships with scientists, public relations firms, and lawyers. More than this, though,
the story of the tobacco industry’s decades-long cover-up of the health risks associated
with smoking – the story of the “cigarette century” – holds lessons on major themes of
the twentieth century American political and cultural life: the political influence of
corporations, the development of public relations, the influence and malleability of
scientific knowledge, the corporate turn toward global markets, the growth of the
American bureaucracy and its influence on the habits and habitus of Americans.39

Organized tobacco farmers made the “cigarette century” as surely as the deceptive
cunning of Big Tobacco. Acknowledging the agency of both industry and farmers
necessitates taking a more nuanced, fine-grained approach to both the expanse of the
tobacco industry, and the shape, geography, and influence of the state. Stepping outside
of the conventions that undergird discussions of regulation in America—envisioning

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39 The literature on the history of cigarettes is extensive, and, largely, very good. Brandt’s
Cigarette Century is by far the most readable, comprehensive and bold account not only of
tobacco policy, but of how the cigarette came to define twentieth century American culture more
generally. See also, Richard Kluger, Ashes to Ashes: America’s Hundred-Year Cigarette War, the
Public Health, and the Unabashed Triumph of Philip Morris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996);
Robert N. Proctor, Golden Holocaust: Origins of the Cigarette Catastrophe and the Case for
Abolition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds.,
Agnatology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008);
sectors of the American economy as incorporated within state decision-making practices—could yield new insights into processes of institution and knowledge formation. Indeed, this dissertation may be of special interest to historians of science working on epistemological questions at the intersection of science and industry. Corporatism suggests that we might understand the byproducts of interested inquiry—on the part of industry, farmers, activists, or public health experts—as something more than “captured knowledge” or science-for-hire.\footnote{Naomi Oreskes, 
\textit{Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming}. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Proctor and Schiebinger, \textit{Agnotology}.} In addition to MSA-derived internal industry documents, this dissertation makes use of farm organization records of that demonstrate a high level of contact and cooperation between farmer associations and North Carolina State College. “Tobacco science” researched at the land grant college, preached by government agricultural agents and the tobacco industry, and practiced by tobacco farmers represented less corporate perversion of value-free inquiry, than corporatist production of knowledge for sector-specific goals. That is, North Carolina State College was invested in the American tobacco economy and produced science to bolster it. The legal remediation for the social cost of smoking that has produced freely-accessible evidence of Big Tobacco’s perfidy has tended to cloud this fact.

Tobacco corporatism relied on personal connections and regional institutions like NC State. This dissertation, therefore, also tells a story about both the persistence of regionalism. Beginning in 1964 with the publication of the \textit{Report on Smoking and Health}, lawyers, health advocates, and health-conscious congressmen attempted to save lives by convincing consumers to kick the habit. These now-familiar milestones in public
health—the cigarette warning label, the extinction of cigarette vending machines, the decline of the smokers’ lounge—hide a story of producer activism that runs parallel to this better known narrative of consumer persuasion. Even as agriculture declined in economic importance across the rest of the South, tobacco farmers redoubled the commitment of their region to production. Until the 1980s, North Carolina traded places with Mississippi each year for the title of lowest industrial wages paid nationwide.\(^{41}\) At the same time, the government price support program kept the state’s small-scale tobacco farmers economically secure. In short, for North Carolinians with neither the desire nor the mobility to enter the professional classes, nothing paid like tobacco. In 1979, flue-cured tobacco offered a net-return of $1,200 per acre—compared to $72 for soybeans, $63 for wheat, and $105 for corn—generating a $1.3 billion in wealth for the state in 1980.\(^{42}\) Farmers’ own efforts at commodity promotion offer a new perspective on the political economy of the Sunbelt, and on the globalization of the “tobacco epidemic.”

In describing a century of organizing, this dissertation also illustrates the persistence of producerism in the era of the consumer. In their respective assessments of American state development and political culture, historians Lizabeth Cohen and Meg Jacobs have argued that the twentieth century saw a profound change in the way that Americans understood themselves and their government. A postwar “landscape of consumption”—whose specific features included increasing suburbanization, low unemployment achieved through Keynesian macroeconomic approaches, and visions of fully-stocked pantries of mass-produced brand named items—was rooted in a political vision in which Americans could fulfill “personal desire and civic obligation by


More than a gloss on social materialism or the hegemony of the advertising business, consumerism was an organizing principle of American political economy—in Jacobs words, “the linchpin in an ongoing political debate about how to organize, reform, and regulate American capitalism.” But producers, though fewer in number, continued to exist within the Consumers’ Republic. Tobacco farmers pointed toward the ascendancy of the consumer to argue that their own interests were being ignored, and to claim title to special privileges as recompense. And the same processes of wartime bureaucratic expansion that gave rise to the ethos of economic citizenship also enabled producers to look beyond the borders of the United States in pursuit of their own dreams of abundance. As the politics of consumerism remade the domestic economy, a parallel politics of producerism reshaped global markets.

Tobacco tethered local practice to global forces in ways that scholars of the postwar South have yet to explain fully. Historians have argued that a growth-obsessed, increasingly urbanized Sunbelt emerged in a postwar South less and less economically reliant on agriculture. In his seminal *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, Bruce Schulman describes a region transformed from its dubious distinction as the “Nation’s No.1.

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economic problem.” Postwar federal spending, particularly on defense and research, disproportionately benefitted the South. At the same time, southern leaders, solicitous of new businesses, touted their region’s hospitable “business climate.” In so doing, growth-oriented boosters capitalized on a brutal facet of southern distinctiveness: a poorly paid, non-unionized labor force. These two developments gave shape to the newest New South, which, as Schulman contends, was less obviously racist than its Cotton Belt instantiation, but nonetheless inhumane—reflecting an emphasis on “regional development rather than human development.”

Early observers of this transformation predicted that the future of the region resided in cities. The eminent political scientist V.O. Key observed in 1949 that cities contained the “seeds of political change for the South.” A few years later, C. Vann Woodward wrote as a bystander to a “Bulldozer Revolution” that was leveling “all the old monuments of regional distinctiveness” before his eyes. Even before the Sunbelt acquired a name—in 1969, when Republican political strategist Kevin Phillips coined the term in The Emerging Republican Majority—its hallmark social and economic effects

were associated with the diminution of the agricultural economy and an attendant fading of southern distinctiveness.

More recently, historians have turned from the cities to the suburbs, documenting how the “suburbs of the postwar south…were home to the most dynamic and cutting edge forces anywhere in the region.” These forces—an anti-tax, antiregulatory, pro-growth economic base overlaid with a fiercely local, increasingly Republican social politics—were transregional, suggesting national convergence between once-distinct geographies. Historians of modern partisan realignments have pointed out that the suburbs of Atlanta and Charlotte began to look, sound, and vote a lot like those of Los Angeles and Phoenix. As scholars of the Sunbelt followed the demographic, economic and political trends of the postwar South to the suburbs, they found fewer reasons to hold onto region as an explanatory category. Provocatively proclaiming an “end to southern history,” some historians of the postwar South have wondered whether the “myth of southern exceptionalism” only serves to reinforce notions of American exceptionalism more generally. After all, the agricultural South—most malignantly manifested as slavery, Jim Crow, rural poverty and black disfranchisement—created the “American dilemma.” The southern countryside made the South distinct from the nation, and the nation distinct from others. For historians intent on moving beyond the “obsessions of

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55 Idem.
regional distinctiveness,” the less-agricultural South held the possibility of a truly global history.  

At the same time as the metropolitan Sunbelt came into focus through electoral results, district maps, and census data, agricultural historians elegized the “rural worlds lost” to the bulldozer, the office park, and the subdivision.  The human exodus from cotton culture that followed the rise of capital-intensive, mechanized agricultural production cleared a path for suburbs and the partisan realignments that gave them their particular political flavor. Nevertheless, the analytical stance assumed by both suburban and agricultural historians has tended to obscure dynamism within the fields themselves. The story of tobacco cultivation after the Second World War complicates this picture. The size of tobacco farms shrank after the war, but their influence grew. The persistence and, indeed, expansion of a commodity economy in the postwar era highlights a growing recognition that a Sunbelt model solely focused on cities, suburbs and demographic change inadequately explains postwar political and economic reconfigurations.  

Frozen in place by New Deal-era laws governing acreage cultivation, tobacco was an unmistakably southern crop. But farmers became richer and more organized through many of the same general processes that empowered metropolitan business progressives. The federal government’s underwriting of putatively private institutions created both the Sunbelt and the tobacco belt. Fusing state and private resources, and frequently becoming

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the executors of government policy, these private organizations nonetheless perpetuated a “free-market,” individualist ethos that masked their own ties to the state.\(^{59}\) In this corporatist political-economic configuration we find the institutions and ideologies that structured and gave meaning to postwar metropolitan and agricultural economies alike. The “white picket welfare” of the suburbs and the “agricultural welfare” of the countryside were created by the same government, but were mythologized as two American dreams: home ownership and agrarian independence.\(^{60}\) Millions of Americans realized their dreams of a family farm and a family home through government policies ranging from low-interest mortgages to federal disaster insurance. Putting tobacco into the Sunbelt, we see the region defined as much by economic strategies as by geography or demography.

Inside a McDonalds franchise that stands free in the parking lot of a strip mall—a strip of chain stores so ubiquitous and anonymous that they could be anywhere but are, in fact, in the rapidly developing suburb of Cary, North Carolina—the Sunbelt and the tobacco belt collided in the personage of Billy Yeargin. The biography of the self-proclaimed “tobacco historian”—whose other professional titles include tobacco lobbyist, government liaison, agribusiness owner, and lecturer for the North Carolina Humanities Council—testifies to the importance of economic organization, political privilege, and evocative imagery in the production of tobacco.


III. Chapter Summary and Structure

The six chapters of my dissertation proceed chronologically and are structured around three main themes: incorporation, expansion, and defense. My first two chapters establish tobacco farming as a corporatist endeavor. Tobacco farmers, organized and eventually licensed by the state, planned and administered tobacco policy in collaboration with agricultural officials. I follow North Carolina tobacco growers and their organizations from the agricultural depression of the 1920s through end of the “first” New Deal in 1936. These chapters speak directly to scholars of political economy, complicating both state-centered and society-centered models of American political development. Beginning with the halting federal responses to the “farm crisis” of the 1920s, agricultural elites became integrated into the policymaking and administrative structure of the state. Farmers were stakeholders in the policies they administered; they organized their neighbors, corralled them to meetings, and eventually made sure they approved and enacted acreage reduction. Farmers’ privileged position within the state was justified by the deep-seeded cultural resonance of the agrarian myth. Ironically, farmers argued that they were entitled to agricultural welfare because of their iconic status as independent yeoman. By the same token, agricultural corporatism was widely praised as “agrarian democracy,” as farmers crafted and ratified policies that suited their needs.

Drawing on the records of tobacco growers’ interest groups, the papers of state agricultural officials, and the papers of congressmen representing tobacco-growing districts, chapters three and four assess the depth and breadth of tobacco farmers’
influence on policy. My third chapter contends that far from undoing the early New Deal’s experiments in cartelization, the policies of the late 1930s further tightened tobacco production controls, and institutionally invested growers in expanding cigarette consumption. For this reason, it is possible to consider New Deal agriculture policy a major factor in the creation of the “Tobacco Lobby” devoted to increasing cigarette consumption. Chapter four continues to follow farmers’ ambitions to shape consumption patterns. Through growers’ lobbying efforts, tobacco was included in aid packages like the Marshall Plan and the “Food-for-Peace” program. American leadership in postwar European economic reconstruction thus enabled farmers to cultivate new markets—and new smokers.

In the early 1950s, the cigarette began to come under intense medical scrutiny. My final two chapters and conclusion examine how growers sought to marshal their considerable institutional and political clout in defense of their crop. Using the papers of tobacco scientists at North Carolina State College and the journal *Tobacco Science*, my fifth chapter speaks to agriculture’s influence on science in the 1960s. Through the agricultural bureaucracy and the land grant college, farmers contested the scientific and regulatory authority of those who sought to diminish cigarette consumption. Historians of science have rightly argued that tobacco companies pioneered techniques of scientific doubt in order to reap tremendous profits by forestalling regulation in America and increasing consumption abroad. My research shows, however, that farmers were active agents in a larger process of epistemological policing—a process that sought to lodge scientific authority at producer-controlled research institutions.
Chapter six and the conclusion reflect more broadly on what agricultural corporatism means for American political culture, exploring the regulatory and discursive influence of the agrarian myth. Using previously unexamined papers of a public relations organization supported by farmers, industry, and government between 1958 and 1998, chapter six illustrates farmers’ growing obsession with public relations. Through state-supported private interest groups, farmers were able to defend livelihoods as tobacco producers even when the medical case against cigarette consumption could not be refuted.

This dissertation does not end with fracture or decline. In noting the late-coming land consolidation and mechanization of the tobacco belt, my conclusion suggests that the shift from a labor-intensive to a capital-intensive form of production may actually have helped farmers tighten their hold on the federal tobacco program. Changes to the tobacco program in the late 1960s kept the most prosperous farmers on the land and drove less capitalized growers into off-farm employment. Those who remained in tobacco were the most determined and the most able to control the financial, political, educational, and discursive institutions of tobacco production.

Tobacco farmers mastered crop control. In the economic and administrative sense, their efforts were responsible for the federal tobacco program’s seventy-year streak—longer and more successful than any other commodity program. In a metaphorical sense, tobacco farmers also controlled the meaning of their crop. Through agencies that straddled the boundary between the public and the private spheres, farmers promoted a vision of themselves as nobly defying the longest of odds. The corporatist configuration of the tobacco economy allowed farmers to have the best of both worlds: they used their
state-based privilege to expand markets while at the same time portraying themselves as independent and free men—men whose very existence was deeply entwined with American history. The seeming incongruity between the practice of privilege and a deeply held belief in independence bespeaks the capaciousness of American economic practices, and the poverty of the language we use to describe them.
PART I:

INCORPORATION
Chapter 1:
The Roots of Commodity Corporatism in the 1920s

After the First World War, tobacco growers seethed with resentment toward tobacco companies. “The big companies seem to have a double-barreled purpose,” the influential farm publication *Progressive Farmer* opined in 1920. “By paying nothing but low prices early in the season, they expect to…get a large part of their [tobacco] requirement ridiculously cheap.” Having forced desperate farmers to sell their harvest early, tobacco buyers “expect to so increase prices to encourage tobacco farmers to plant enough tobacco in 1921.”

Overwhelming market power enabled a small concentration of tobacco firms to dictate the price of tobacco leaf in the marketplace, the amount of leaf produced within the fields, and even the expansion of the tobacco belt itself. But farm leaders promised a fight against their well-heeled foes. “Wall Street is not counting on the strong resistance which we have faith farmers will show,” the *Progressive Farmer* argued. To improve their economic chances, farmers needed “a little time and a lot of farmer spunk”—and, most importantly, organization.

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3 Idem. In his recent work on the political vision of the late nineteenth century agrarian revolt, historian Charles Postel has convincingly argued that some Populists were similarly animated by a desire to adopt the successful organizational techniques of contemporary businessmen. Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Legal historian Victoria Saker Woeste has written the most extensively on farmers’ organizational forms in the 1920s. Using the example of a California raisin growers’ association, Woeste argues that agricultural cooperatives emulated the successful organizational forms of labor to gain bargaining power vis-à-vis corporations. Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmers’ Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
This chapter examines the efforts of bright leaf tobacco growers to figure out their place within the American economy during the 1920s. Farmers and agricultural reformers could see that organization was improving the economic horizons of other sectors of the economy. Unions were helping wage workers to find economic power in their collective presence on the factory floor. Businessmen, too, had long known the benefits of pooling their most important resource—capital—in industrial monopolies. Tobacco growers in the “bright” tobacco belt of Virginia and the Carolinas also tried their hand at organization, forming the Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative Association (TGCA) during the agricultural depression of the early 1920s. Geographically scattered and too poor to consider economic strategies that did not offer immediate cash, tobacco growers never were able to achieve the level of organization that could improve their position in the marketplace. Though the cooperative enterprise failed, the process of corralling tens of thousands of scattered farmers into a shared economic vision paved the way for the New Deal’s overhaul of farm economies. The chapter ends with a discussion of the cooperative’s key legacy: the increasingly tight ties binding agricultural bureaucracies and farm groups. The political discourse of the 1920s, suffused with discussion of the neighborly virtues of “farmer self-help,” was premised on a working consensus between

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the rural government and citizenry. In the tobacco belt, state officials and tobacco growers came to share the same vision of the moral worth of cooperation, and the economic importance of the organizational form. The commodity cooperative laid the roots of commodity corporatism that would soon transform farmers into state administrators.⁶

The infamous “Tobacco Trust” was technically dead. Buck Duke’s American Tobacco Company, once responsible for 80-90 percent of the American cigarette trade, had been busted by Supreme Court decree in 1911. On the very same day that it broke up the Standard Oil Trust, the Supreme Court in United States v. American Tobacco Company found Duke’s monopoly in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act.⁷ But in 1920 farmers still spoke of “The Trust” in dark terms, suspicious of the four successor firms’ clubby collusion in setting the prices at the tobacco auction markets that dotted the countryside of the rural southeast. For farmers, the numbers did not add up. Tobacco companies were making more and more money. Breathless reports in the Wall Street Journal attested to the industry’s “unlimited” potential.⁸ Indeed, the four largest tobacco firms netted record returns on investments year after year as record numbers of

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⁷ For a concise discussion of the political and cultural meaning of the Tobacco Trust and its dissolution, see Allan M. Brandt, The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 33-43.

Americans began smoking. Addictions nursed by wartime soldiers’ rations, rising levels or urbanization, and loosened social mores regarding women’s behavior more than doubled American per capita cigarette consumption between 1920 and 1929.10

But bright leaf tobacco farmers—cultivators of the primary ingredient in the ever-popular manufactured cigarette—were not sharing in the industry bounty. The prices farmers received for a pound of tobacco appeared to them unrelated to the overall prosperity of the industry, or to the demand for their crop. In 1921, a pound of bright leaf tobacco sold for less than half its price the year before. Yet farmers who took the yearly average of 21 cents per pound in 1921 may well have looked back fondly to such prices in 1928, when the same tobacco yielded just 17 cents a pound.11 From a farmer’s perspective, it would not have mattered if tobacco titan Buck Duke himself showed up at an auction to bid on every last pound of leaf. The “Big Four” tobacco companies still dictated the price of tobacco—determining the cash a grower received from a year’s worth of work, and a family’s worth of labor. Monopoly or oligopoly, the problem looked the same to a farmer: he had no control over what price the auctioneer chanted. This fact was true even when prices were good.

Like many other crops, tobacco was a victim of the postwar agricultural depression. What farmers called a “farm crisis” pushed a multi-party coalition of

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legislators into a “farm bloc.” Out of a hybrid political alliance emerged the decade’s signature legal and economic remedy for what ailed agriculture: the commodity cooperative. Agricultural marketing organizations were exempted from the injunctions against monopoly that had busted Duke’s Tobacco Trust in the previous decade. Beginning in 1921, the Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative Association promised farmers in Virginia and the Carolinas to “do for farmers what labor unions were attempting to do for wage workers: provide the economic and organizational benefits of collective bargaining to individuals otherwise left on their own.”

By 1926, however, it was in receivership, and tobacco growers brimmed with recrimination not only against tobacco companies, but also against each other.

Perhaps today’s economists could have predicted the organization’s demise. Without monopoly—or even majority—control over the tobacco harvest, commodity cooperatives posed a classic collective action problem. The cooperative only worked if a majority of growers pledged to sell exclusively to the cooperative, empowering the organization to dictate a price to tobacco companies. But if the cooperative succeeded in bargaining the price of tobacco upward, more and more farmers might be tempted to defect by selling outside the cooperative at the auction market. The asymmetries within the tobacco trade—many scattered sellers, few concentrated buyers—enabled swift, outright sectoral sabotage. An alliance of manufacturers and middlemen, fewer in number, wealthier and more coordinated, were able to undermine the monopolistic

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aspirations of the cooperative by promising high prices to influential growers who defected or refused to join.

At the same time, a less predictable but very visible transformation in the geography of tobacco production was afoot. Defying the logic of self-regulating markets, tobacco production was expanding into new swaths of the South even as prices dropped. Glossy tobacco leaves blanketed areas that just a year before were covered in boll weevils and chewed-through cotton lint. Believing they were escaping the dual plague of low prices and infestation, farmers in eastern North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and northern Florida traded in one monoculture for another.\textsuperscript{14}

It was impossible for the cooperative to control the harvest of an expanding market. Every time a new farmer pledged to the cooperative, another broke land even farther east, reducing a farmer’s desire to cooperate while also making cooperation more difficult for loyalists.\textsuperscript{15} And so the auction system continued to reign as the main point of contact between buyers and sellers of tobacco. New auction markets, the barnlike warehouses to which farmers hauled their crop every fall, popped up beyond the traditional geographies of the “old” tobacco belt of the hilly piedmont of Virginia and North Carolina. In new warehouses in North Carolina’s eastern coastal plain, in cities like Wilson and Greenville, farmers met the stark fact of their own disempowerment in the marketplace.

But the Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative achieved permanence through its demise. Its founding, promotion, and expansion in the North Carolina tobacco belt established an important connection between farmers and the agricultural bureaucracy, particularly the Extension Service. Justified through the moral language of self-help and the emerging economic language of collective bargaining, the tobacco cooperative laid the groundwork for the New Deal’s incorporation of farmers directly into the agricultural bureaucracy. Far from the pinnacle of laissez-faire economic arrangements, the political economy of tobacco production in the 1920s created the institutions and human connections that ultimately shaped New Deal agricultural policy.

This is a story about how tobacco farmers understood their market horizons in economic and political terms before their formal invitation to incorporate within the state. It begins, fittingly enough, at the auction house. There, tobacco farmers, buyers, middlemen and singing auctioneers enacted a spirited but sometimes dispiriting economic and human drama. Defeating the auction system was the goal of cooperative tobacco marketing. But the cooperative could not shutter the auction market’s loading docks; indeed, the auction house sale thrived as one of the signature set pieces of tobacco farm life in the twentieth century. Understanding its intractability reveals farmers’ frustrations, and the institutions through which they ultimately achieved prosperity.

I. The Tobacco Industry

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The only way to understand why farmers needed organization in the 1920s is to understand the structure of the tobacco industry at the turn of the century. In 1880, a local engineer entered a contest sponsored by the Richmond-based Allen and Ginter tobacco firm. James Bonsack’s cigarette rolling device revolutionized the industry, producing in one day a quantity of cigarettes that took the efforts of 48 skilled hand-rollers.\(^\text{18}\) The shrewd dealmaking of a young James B. “Buck” Duke allowed the Durham (NC)-based W. Duke, Sons & Co. to acquire exclusive use of the Bonsack machine. At the time, conventional wisdom suggested that consumers would reject machine-made cigarettes, just as they had done with machine-made cigars.\(^\text{19}\) But Duke, imagining a new market opened by Congress’ recent reduction in the cigarette tax, was undeterred.\(^\text{20}\) In 1884, Duke installed the first rolling machine in his Durham factory. By 1886 he had acquired 14 more. By 1889, Duke’s exclusive right to the 24 Bonsack machines humming out cigarettes in the United States gave him incredible power in the tobacco trade. W. Duke, Sons & Co. produced as many cigarettes as all of its competitors combined.\(^\text{21}\)

Duke formalized this tremendous market capture through the legal tool of the holding company. In 1890, the American Tobacco Company (ATC) was incorporated in New Jersey, a state that had recently loosened its incorporation laws to provide a safe

\(^\text{19}\) Tate, *Cigarette Wars*, 15.
\(^\text{20}\) The tax reduction, which had been debated in front of congress sporadically since 1880, passed in 1883. Duke responded by immediately cutting the price of cigarettes in half to 5 cents a package. This gave him an immediate foothold in the market, despite selling at a loss for several months. Tate, *Cigarette Wars*, 14.
haven for capitalists seeking an end-run around the Sherman Antitrust Act.\textsuperscript{22} Having used price-cutting as a weapon to disarm his less-capitalized, less-mechanized competitors, Duke successfully consolidated the next four largest tobacco companies into the ATC empire. The “Tobacco Trust” was thus immediately responsible for 90% of cigarette sales.\textsuperscript{23} During the highpoint of the “Great Merger Movement” of the late nineteenth century, Duke horizontally aggregated the trade even more, absorbing 250 separate companies to dominate the plug, snuff, and smoking tobacco markets.\textsuperscript{24} By 1910 its assets had grown to $350 million from an original capitalization of $25 million in 1890. By another metric of wealth, for every $1,000 invested in 1890 brought $36,000 in profit in 1908.\textsuperscript{25}

Duke’s staggering dominance was ultimately broken by court decree in 1911 in \textit{United States v. American Tobacco Company}. On the same day that it found John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Supreme Court deemed Duke’s market concentration monopolistic as well. In its ruling, the Court found ATC’s stranglehold on the tobacco market a restraint of trade—carried out in “methods and manners clearly within the prohibition of the Anti-Trust Act.”\textsuperscript{26} But the four successor firms that rose from the ashes of the Tobacco Trust—R.J. Reynolds, Liggett & Myers, P. Lorillard, and a leaner American Tobacco—were hardly paragons of

\textsuperscript{23} Brandt, \textit{Cigarette Century}, 32-36.
\textsuperscript{25} Brandt, \textit{Cigarette Century}, 38; Tennant notes that “the total return on $1,000 invested in 1890 without withdrawal and also without reinvestment of dividends would have been $35,197. \textit{American Cigarette Industry}, 39.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{United States v. American Tobacco Co.}, 221 U.S. 106 (1911).
competition. For consumers, the Supreme Court, and the Justice Department, Duke’s virtual monopoly on cigarette production through horizontal aggregation was the most conspicuous feature of the Trust. ATC profited regardless of the brand a smoker picked up at his local retailer. For tobacco growers, however, the Trust came to symbolize both horizontal and vertical integration that stopped just short of the farm.  

ATC’s extensive tobacco purchasing operation—the “Leaf Department”—came to serve as a model of internal organization in successor companies and in other industries. “Leaf men” were the points of contact between farmers marketing their harvest, and the industrial machine ready to turn the plant material into a consumable product. These were the buyers responsible for riding the tobacco auction circuit—trailing the opening of auction markets from Florida to Maryland in order to make sure that American Tobacco’s purchasing requirements were satisfied. These men were usually native to tobacco country, possessed the “complex local knowledge” necessary for authority within the global tobacco industry, and were in many ways the manufacturing-side analogues to the artisanal curers. Like farmers who prided themselves on the quality of their cure, leaf men projected a sense of historic craftsmanship—a feeling that their keen eye for fine leaf was something you had to learn.

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27 Barbara Hahn explains that, “ATC made little effort to grow or cure its own leaf” because “it had no need to integrate backward into raw material production” when “so many small producers shouldered the risk of getting it wrong.” Barbara Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1916–1937* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 135.

28 Daniel, *Breaking the Land*, 202; Nan Enstad. “To Know Tobacco: Southern Identity in China in the Jim Crow Era.” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 4 (2007): 6–23. Nan Enstad contends that “transnational industry incorporated southern networks” into its hiring practices. She suggests a much longer history to the story of globalization in the southern United States, and illustrates that the multinational tobacco industry was at the forefront of this process in the early twentieth century. In her story, “southern-ness” was not incidental to or erased by the multinational capital and global labor markets. It was absolutely foundational to the production of the cigarette.
at an early age. Tobacco buyers certainly possessed a great deal of market, scientific, and folk acumen. But the leaf man’s power was also structural. Three factors gave tobacco buyers particular power over farmers: lack of grade standardization for tobacco, lack of information about tobacco stocks held in reserve by the tobacco companies, and quiet collusion among the buyers themselves.

Since Reconstruction, many farmers had articulated an angry critique of monopoly, most famously against the railroad “octopus” that threatened to squeeze the life out of the hardworking farmers and ranchers forced to pay discriminatory rates.

30 At the turn of the twentieth century, this language, at one time relegated to the Populist fringe of American politics, began to resonate with urban elites and legal scholars. The belated indictment of the Tobacco and Standard Oil Trusts under the Sherman Act reflected the cultural uneasiness with competition-stifling bigness, and its potential threat to individualism. But even as farmers cussed Buck Duke—his ruthless tactics, his unimaginable wealth—they sought to emulate the very techniques that had made him rich. Indeed, the “night riding” episodes of 1906 and 1907—the bursts of coordinated vigilantism in which some tobacco farmers burned the crops of neighbors

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31 Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Economy: Public Policy and Economic Change in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990);
33 Charles Postel’s revisionist account of Populism argues that the farm movements of the late nineteenth century were preeminently concerned with scientific organization and even the creation of a “Farmers’ Trust.”
suspected of selling to American Tobacco—underscored the determination of farmers to control their economic horizons.\textsuperscript{34}

\section*{II. The Auction Market}

Were it not for the money, tobacco growers’ direct interaction with the market would have been a seconds-long anti-climax after a thirteen-month prelude. Inside the auction warehouse, piles of tobacco were arranged across the floor, with farmers manning their heap. Clumps of well-dressed men—the tobacco buyers—huddled around the piles as an auctioneer sang out an indecipherably rapid chant. “Sweet as honey, honey honey, gimme thirty, gimme thirty.” Winks, hand gestures. “Thirty and a quarter.” In the blink of an eye—sometimes \textit{by} the blink of an eye—the farmer’s crop was sold.\textsuperscript{35} The name of the manufacturer who won the auction punctuated the end of the transaction. Later, many mid-century Americans were more familiar with the auction system than they thought; American Tobacco Company introduced radio listeners to the most famous auctioneer in the United States, “Speed” Riggs, whose voice rounded out the advertisements for Lucky cigarettes with a signature “Sold American!” singsong. Lightning rapidity characterized these transactions, as auctioneers and warehouse owners took fees for all tobacco sold. In


\textsuperscript{35} Tobacco buyers relied on a complicated set of gesticulations to signal their purchase to the auctioneer. For an excellent atmospheric description of the process see Daniel, Idem. Thomas Jackson Woofter, \textit{The Plight of Cigarette Tobacco} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1931), chapter 4.
the 1930s, rules were imposed to decrease the speed of auction to 360 piles an hour—six sales a minute, or ten seconds per pile.36

Trailing behind the buyers were the “lightning calculators.” In the words of one observer to an auction in the 1930s: “The clipman puts down on his sheets the number of each pile, its poundage and bid price…the bookman’s sheets already have the growers name, number and poundage, and to this he adds the bid price, the buyer, and the buyers grade.” 37 After a few seconds of rapid arithmetic—price per pound by the number of pounds sold—the calculation sheets were run over to the warehouse’s bookkeeping office where a weighing fee, an auction fee, and a warehouse commission were deducted. Farmers then dashed over to the pay window, where, in exchange for a ticket of sale, they received cash on the spot. According to one early twentieth century observer, it was “common for no more than ten minutes to pass between sale and payoff.”38 Meanwhile, warehouse hands helped buyers hoist the purchased tobacco leaf onto the flatbeds of trucks headed for manufacturer-owned processing plants. There, the loose leaf tobacco would be re-dried, de-stemmed, and prepared for aging and several years of storage before its ultimate reconstitution inside of a cigarette.

This was the surface of the auction floor. Only a sliver of the floor action had anything to do with competitive bidding. The warehouse was a space in which whiteness and wealth mattered a great deal. Physically the buyers were in control in suits and hats and a look of easy assurance; farmers, by contrast, were recognizable for their awkwardness in cheap “town” clothes, or maybe just because they were dressed like

36 Daniel, Breaking the Land, 209; Tilley, Bright Tobacco Industry, 205.
37 Quoted in Daniel, Breaking the Land, 27.
38 Quoted in Tilley, Bright Tobacco Industry, 305.
farmers in overalls.\textsuperscript{39} Blacks were employed by the warehouses only in the most menial of positions—arranging tobacco on the floor or hauling it to buyers’ trucks. As sellers of tobacco, black farmers generally received less for their crop than whites and were sometimes the victims of auction-floor swindles and speculations.\textsuperscript{40} Frequently poor farmers deemed it prudent to pay their wealthier neighbors a few dollars to market the tobacco for them. Buyers often “shaded up” the price for influential farmers, which is why tenants often asked their landlords to sell in their stead—further reducing the amount of control poor farmers exercised in the marketplace.\textsuperscript{41}

Farmers could refuse to accept a final bid, but the pressures against doing this were so enormous as to render choice a farce. Despite the official dissolution of the Tobacco Trust by Supreme Court decree in 1911, there was very little competition in bidding, and an extreme concentration of buying power. A 1926 Federal Trade Commission inquiry into market conditions in the Carolinas and Virginia continued to find domination by the “American Tobacco Company, P. Lorillard and Company, Liggett and Meyers Tobacco Company, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, the Export Leaf Tobacco company [the buying agency for British-American Tobacco Company], and the Imperial Tobacco Company.”\textsuperscript{42} Middlemen formally unaffiliated with any of the major companies rounded out the pack of perambulating bidders. But even though they purchased about 25% of the leaf on the auction floor, the presence of “independent” buyers did not add any layer of competition to the process. Frequently, they operated under instructions from manufacturers, just as directly-employed buyers did. As another

\textsuperscript{39} Woofter, \textit{Plight of Cigarette Tobacco}, 42.
\textsuperscript{40} Tilley, \textit{Bright Tobacco Industry}, 205.
\textsuperscript{41} Woofter, \textit{Plight of Cigarette Tobacco}, 45.
\textsuperscript{42} Quoted in Ibid., 26.
Federal Trade Commission inquiry noted in 1920, these dealers often purchased tobacco for multiple companies, which had “a tendency to lower prices in that competition is eliminated in proportion to the number of companies involved.” During the 1920s a pro-business Federal Trade Commission was not particularly interested in pursuing restraint of trade charges against tobacco firms. However, many tobaccomen believed that manufactures colluded in setting bid prices for tobacco. The same inquiry tepidly concluded that “many of the independent dealers and warehousemen were unequivocal in their statements...that they did not observe...that there was collusion on the part of manufactures and large dealers in the buying of leaf tobacco.” There were, however, “many who expressed a contrary opinion.”

But, as one agricultural economist pointed out in 1931, crude collusion was hardly necessary. Buyers knew the range of bids offered by their rivals. Because buyers never purchased to satisfy immediate demand—tobacco companies always had at least two or three years as reserve in storage—they were not actually trying to obtain “the best” tobacco in order to improve their own product, or to deny it to their rivals. They were merely trying to secure their leaf requirement as cheaply as possible. Furthermore, manufacturers recognized their own influence on the price of tobacco leaf, and pursued non-aggressive bidding policies in order to maintain certain “rules of the game” by which

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all companies could buy leaf without actually engaging in a bidding war. As the economist put it, “under these circumstances, actual collusion in fixing bidding limits is hardly necessary—a gentleman’s agreement not to ‘hog the market’ would seem to be ample enough.”

Even if auctions were competitive, farmers faced opportunity cost constraints in putting their crop on the auction floor. Regardless of whether the farmer accepted the bid price, he still had to pay auction fees and commissions; he had already sunk money into transportation and perhaps lodging, and he would not want to pay twice. Moreover, tobacco is a perishable crop—it needs to be re-dried after it is cured. Farmers could not simply hold the crop at home if they knew that prices had been low at nearby markets. They had to sell—and fast.

But perhaps the biggest deterrent to rejecting a low bid was that farmers did not actually know if a bid was too low or high enough. Put differently, farmers were ignorant of the estimated value of their tobacco. Though farmers and their families had already sorted the tobacco by like qualities on the farm, there were no uniform “grades” or standards of leaf quality that could be expected to fetch an approximate price. The fact that tobacco companies kept years’ worth of tobacco in storage further rendered farmers ignorant. They had no idea what, exactly, manufacturers needed. Buyers’ appraisals of tobacco grades were shrouded in secrecy. According to one incredulous auction observer, “a buyer has a set of grades, indicated by code markets changed annually or oftener.

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48 Woofter, Plight of Cigarette Tobacco, 48.
These grades are kept secret, as is the ultimate use of the tobacco thus graded.\textsuperscript{50} Farmers were clueless as to what kind and how much of a crop they should cultivate. In the absence of information on supply and demand, all farmers could do was produce—and overproduce—compounding their problems, reducing their payday.

III. Agriculture and Industry: Conflict and Cooperation in the 1920s

Farmers in tobacco country knew that the auction system did not serve their interests—that it thrived only because they needed immediate cash to service the substantial debts they incurred over the previous year.\textsuperscript{51} Within the innovations in statecraft during the First World War, rural reformers saw an opportunity for farmers to control their economic horizons. Historian Robert D. Cuff has emphasized the “complexity, hesitancy, and ambiguity” of the government-business relationship during the war. Though he cautions against reading the War Industries Board (WIB) as a direct prelude to the political economy of the 1920s, Cuff also presents a compelling case for how the WIB came to symbolize smooth, coordinated voluntarism. The task of delegated industrial war planning was haphazard and messy—not infrequently uncoordinated and coerced. But “after the war, the desire of… administrator-businessmen to believe that cooperative consensus was sufficient for industrial mobilization” propped up a myth of

\textsuperscript{50} Samuel Thomas Emory, \textit{Bright Tobacco in the Agriculture, Industry, and Foreign Trade of North Carolina} (Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 1939), 85.

\textsuperscript{51} The literature on land tenure and credit markets in the rural South is vast. See: Gavin Wright \textit{Old South-New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War} (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Harold D. Woodman, \textit{New South-New Law: The Legal Foundations of Credit and Labor Relations in the Postbellum Agricultural South} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995). Scholars have demonstrated that a lack of rural credit facilities exacerbated tenancy rates across the South. To finance a tobacco harvest, landowners, tenants and sharecroppers had to borrow money at high interest rates. Heavily indebted, farmers faced both subtle and outright pressure to “settle-up” outstanding notes as soon as possible. From a farmer’s perspective, quick cash was the main advantage of the auction system—and the only way he could borrow more money to finance the next year’s crop.
“unity and form.” Sociologists, agricultural economists, and rural reformers saw the wartime coordination between industrialists and government and began to ask how such corporate forms could benefit the agricultural sector.

Though the First World War left a very real institutional legacy within the USDA, within political culture more generally it gave politicians the impression that enlightened voluntarism could coordinate the American economy, and that the proper role of government was to foster this cooperative action. This “lesson”—more apparent than real—was bipartisan, supra-partisan, even, as the corporatist scaffolding outlasted Republican national dominance before the New Deal, and Democratic hegemony in the South. Agricultural interest groups, rural reformers, agricultural economists, and extension service officials were the greatest spokesmen for coordinated consolidation within the agricultural economy during the 1920s. These same spokesmen were also the greatest proponents of New Deal farm policy. The war made large-scale economic organization seem possible, while simultaneously giving rise to a genre-defying “organizational sector” populated by elites and experts who pushed for ever-greater order in the marketing of agricultural commodities.

What historians and state theorists have called “corporatism” or “corporate liberalism” farmers just called “cooperation.” The Tri-State Tobacco Growers

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Cooperative Association was formed in response to the postwar farm crisis. For its boosters, the “Association” promised “equality for agriculture.” Before its failure, the cooperative was heralded as a panacea for farmers’ woes not unlike silver a generation earlier. In contrast to the “free silver” movement of the 1890s, however, calls for cooperative marketing were within the political mainstream. To be sure, entrenched interests opposed the cooperative marketing of bright leaf tobacco, but this opposition was born out of economic interest, not political principle. The failure of cooperative marketing underscores the inadequacy of associationalism as a response to the farm crisis. The political economy of the “associationalist state” could not resolve the essential tension that farmers discovered to be true: even under the best circumstances, organized agriculture could not overcome its disadvantages relative to organized industry absent aggressive federal intervention.  

From postwar price highs, agriculture’s descent into crisis was swift and spectacular. The prices that prevailed in late 1919 and early 1920 made the harvest of 1920 the most costly on record to produce. Slackened European demand and a postwar business recession created a panic just as farmers were bringing an expensive bumper harvest to market. Prices fell below the cost of production and were lower relative to the cost of other commodities. Between July and December 1920, the average price of the ten leading farm crops fell by 57%; in May 1921, prices were just a third of what they were the previous June, and by November of 1921 prices fell below the 1913 level.  

Farmers were worse off than city-dwellers and wage earners as their purchasing power declined

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54 Woeste, Farmer’s Benevolent Trust, 7.
by 40% and commodity prices fell more rapidly than other costs and taxes.\textsuperscript{56} Newspapers frequently ran stories of crops left to rot in fields as labor and transportation costs exceeded returns from crop sales.\textsuperscript{57}

Export and balance-of-payment policy, seemingly remote from rural life, were felt acutely on the farm. Many farmers—tobacco growers foremost among them—were heavily reliant on sales for export.\textsuperscript{58} Before the war, the U.S. owed foreign investors billions. Servicing that debt sent dollars to Europe, particularly England. These dollars were then used to import American goods—including agricultural goods. The war made the United States a creditor, not a debtor, and before European countries could import bright leaf tobacco or long staple cotton, they had to pay their creditor. For farmers, this international shortage of dollars meant a domestic surplus of crops. In the short term, a high protective tariff made the situation worse for farmers who had to buy finished goods in an expensive domestic market but sold on a soft international market.\textsuperscript{59} Historians have not adequately explored the medium and long-term consequences of interwar export and tariff policy. Debtor nations like Canada, Argentina, Egypt, and India were bound by the ties (and tariff schedules) of the British Empire. An interwar policy of “imperial preference” had special significance for tobacco as Canada, India and Australia began competing in bright leaf production to satisfy British cigarette demand. When farmers cursed the protective tariff for helping manufacturers at the expense of agriculture, they

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{58} Throughout the 1920s, no less than 46% and as much as 57% of the entire bright leaf tobacco crop was exported, primarily to the United Kingdom. Tilley, \textit{Bright Tobacco Industry}, 338.
said more than they knew. Creditor America did not merely stifle competition among dominant industrial firms; it actually created new competitors for American farmers.  

The feeling of antagonism between industry and agriculture could be felt in the corridors of government power. Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover disagreed sharply, publicly and personally over how best to organize the ailing agricultural economy. Wallace’s directly interventionist vision, which was eventually embodied in the McNary-Haugen plan of 1927, only achieved influence after his death. Meanwhile, Hoover’s single-minded focus on developing commodity cooperatives had more widespread cachet among farmers than anything proposed by Wallace during his tenure.

Both Wallace and Hoover were Iowans and administrative imperialists, guarding, defending and expanding their bureaucracies wherever possible. Wallace wanted the USDA to be devoted as much to policy as to science, which he achieved through the establishment of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) in 1922. The BAE produced study after study proposing to remedy rural problems—broadly conceived—

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61 As the farmers throughout the United States floundered during the farm crisis of the 1920s, there were several attempts to pass comprehensive farm legislation. The most influential of these attempts was the McNary-Haugen plan, which was first proposed in 1924, but was not passed for another three years. The bill stipulated that commodities in surplus of domestic demand were to be purchased at the domestic price by a government corporation, which would sell the surplus abroad at the world price. Farmers would finance the losses sustained by the surplus corporation through a tax, or “equalization fee,” assessed on each unit of the commodity purchased by the corporation. The two most interventionist aspects of the legislation, the “equalization fee” and the government storage and loan corporation, were the direct antecedents of the “processing tax” and stabilization agencies passed as part of the New Deal’s agricultural policy. The most extensive work on the agricultural politics of the 1920s, especially the McNary-Haugen legislation, remains Gilbert Fite, *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954).
through the application of social science expertise. The Bureau served as kind of a postgraduate fellowship for recipients of advanced degrees from expanded Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology programs, as Cornell and the University of Wisconsin began to mint more Ph.D.s in the fields. These social scientists pioneered market forecasting and reporting techniques, issued reports to farmers about market conditions, and undertook an array of studies on nearly every step in the crop production process—from seed selection to product distribution. Perhaps most importantly, the BAE was a source of policy innovation. Despite some internal debates about whether or not it should be seen as a permanent or emergency measure, agricultural economists at the bureau helped to prepare the first McNary-Haugen bill in 1924.

Hoover, by contrast, envisioned a very limited role for the Department of Agriculture. A 1920 Joint Congressional Committee on Reorganization of the Administrative Branch of the Government occasioned turf warfare and backbiting memos over the committee’s examination of agricultural marketing work. In a confidential memo to the head of the investigation, Hoover articulated his limited vision for the USDA: “the functions of the Department of Agriculture should end when production on the farm is

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complete and movement therefrom starts, and at that point the activities of the Department of Commerce should begin.” Hoover wanted agricultural marketing work conducted in the Department of Commerce, believing that the USDA should merely “tell the farmer what he can best produce based on soil, climatic and other cultural conditions, and the Department of Commerce should tell him how best to dispose of it.”63

Hoover called Wallace a socialist; Wallace accused Hoover of caring more for the commodities than for the men who produced them. To prove this, Wallace recounted a story in which the Secretary of Commerce told some North Dakotan farmers, in response to their reports of marketing abuses in their state, to “go home and slop your hogs.”64 As editor of the influential Wallace’s Farmer newspaper, Wallace knew the power that public opinion could have in defending the USDA’s perimeter. Hoover’s plan was leaked to the press and farmers rallied to the USDA’s defense. Hoover was clearly unsuccessful in this market acquisition, but in 1923, through the receipt of congressional appropriations to “investigate related problems in the development of the foreign trade of the United States in agricultural and manufactured products,” the Department of Commerce successfully usurped the USDA’s initial momentum in establishing a foreign agricultural service. Ultimately the cabinet-level infighting, which played out in front of Congress with two bills competing for appropriations for the service, prevented its organization in either department.65

The Wallace-Hoover division centered on how to direct government intervention in the agricultural economy. Wallace, the Congressional Farm Bloc, and, eventually, the

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63 Shideler, Farm Crisis, 144.
64 Hamilton, From New Day to New Deal, 133.
65 Shideler, Farm Crisis, 141-151; Hamilton, From New Day to New Deal, 133.
American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) favored the establishment of a federal export corporation to purchase surplus agricultural commodities and sell them abroad. As articulated in the McNary-Haugen legislation, farmers would be paid a high, government-determined domestic price, while the low export price would be determined by the international market. Hoover opposed government price fixing, arguing that adjusting production to domestic demand and the elimination of marketing inefficiencies through cooperative organization would restore health to the sick agricultural sector. Wallace’s response to Hoover’s marketing solutions shows that what divided Wallace’s “progressive” vision for agriculture from Hoover’s “conservative” plan was not whether or not to use state capacity to direct the agricultural economy, but how it should be directed. Wallace actively resisted strengthening the relationship between government and cooperatives, pointing toward the USDA’s policy of information supply only. Deriding the “over-enthusiastic persons who have held [cooperative marketing] up as a panacea for all the ills from which farmers are suffering,” Wallace insisted that “the relationship of the government to cooperation should be one of service. It should help the farmers market their crops not by doing the work but by supplying the information which the farmers cannot get for themselves.”

Wallace viewed cooperatives as one tool—and not even the most powerful one—for confronting farm problems.

Because his policies as Secretary of Commerce may have played handmaiden to the Great Depression, and because as President he failed to ameliorate economic disaster, it would be easy to paint Hoover (as Wallace did) as favoring business to the detriment of

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agriculture. Hoover’s service at the helm of the War Food Administration familiarized him with some of the problems of agriculture, even as it caused him to foreclose certain policy options during the 1920s. For instance, as historian David Hamilton has contended, Hoover’s opposition to the price-fixing aspect of the McNary-Haugen plan was forged through the crucible of war—with all of its messy difficulties of administration, rationing and shortages. “I have done more [price fixing] than any other man who lives…and I would not propose price fixing in any form short of re-entering the trenches in a World War.”68 Many farmers shared his opinion. His policies failed and he alienated the short-lived Farm Bloc, but at the beginning of the 1920s, president Harding’s selection of Hoover as the Secretary of Commerce was widely praised by farmers—even by the very Democratic southern farm press.

While it was clear to farmers that Wallace and Hoover had different ideas about agriculture and that Wallace had the backing of the new (and newly powerful) AFBF, southerners in particular were slow to approve of the McNary-Haugen proposal. Leaders of commodity marketing groups were similarly steadfast in their support for Hoover, viewing the export corporation plan as a threat to the cooperative venture.69 Because the South lacked representation within the farm lobby, and because the region was slow in joining farm bureaus, Southern farm leaders continued to cling to the cooperative promise even after other regions began embracing direct price-raising measures.70 For the majority of the 1920s, Southern farm leaders embraced Hoover’s corporatist vision for the organization of agriculture.

68 Wilson, “Herbert Hoover’s Agricultural Policies,” 121.
69 Knapp, Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise, 33-34.
IV. Country Cooperation

Organization in the tobacco belt did not come from a legislative revolution, or the congressional “farm bloc.” It came from rural leadership. An active farm press, rural reformers affiliated with Southern colleges and, crucially, the extension service consistently sought ties with “practical,” “business-minded,” and “progressive farmers” with whom the task of organization could be shared. Longstanding antipathy toward the Tobacco Trusts, warehousemen and speculators added rhetorical heat to calls for cooperation. Associationalism ultimately failed tobacco growers in ways that demonstrated the limits to Hoover’s vision: absent substantial government intervention, organized agriculture was no match for wealthier, more powerful, better-organized interests. But until the late 1920s, some of the most ardent supporters of Hoover’s agricultural vision were farmers who never would have dreamed of voting for anything but “the party of the daddies.” The desperate desire for economic control ran deeper than even the deepest of partisan affiliations. In rural Democratic tobacco country, farmers and local leaders proved to be some of the most hopeful, if not successful, proponents of this vision of social-economic organization.

In 1920, farm prices were crashing, excitement for cooperative marketing was peaking, and rural leaders began to discuss organizing bright leaf tobacco farmers. Organization did not come out nowhere; early in the twentieth century there had been several failed attempts at farmer coordination, most infamously in the Kentucky and Tennessee “black patch.” There, growers of burley and dark tobacco turned on each other, enforcing a “cooperative” boycott of the hated American Tobacco Company by
burning the barns, harvests, and property of farmers suspected of selling to the Trust.\textsuperscript{71} Locally known as the “tobacco war,” this little-known economic violence reached a national audience more than thirty years later when novelist Robert Penn Warren fictionalized it in his debut novel \textit{Night Rider}.\textsuperscript{72}

Fifteen years later, though, tobacco farmers found a plan and a prophet in Aaron Sapiro. Trumpeted by politicians, reformers and economists, Sapiro’s “California plan” for commodity cooperation swept the bright tobacco belt and many other agricultural regions. A California lawyer who innovated and evangelized commodity marketing in the early 1920s, Sapiro was revered and reviled in farm circles, particularly within the Department of Agriculture. He founded the National Council of Farmers’ Cooperative Marketing Association, which lasted from 1922 to 1926, and served as counsel and cooperative specialist to the Farm Bureau until 1924, when the organization shifted its focus toward the McNary-Haugen plan. During his brief, meteoric rise to the top of agricultural-policymaking circles, Sapiro was seen as both a legal genius and a crusading Napoleon, often ignorant of the local conditions and cultures in which he waged his cooperative campaigns. Nevertheless, opponents and supporters alike recognized Sapiro as the preeminent expert on commodity organizing.\textsuperscript{73}

In November 1920, Clarence Poe, the editor of the \textit{Progressive Farmer}, sent a telegram to the California lawyer requesting counsel in establishing a tobacco cooperative. Sapiro responded enthusiastically, requesting further information on the

\textsuperscript{71} Hanna, “Agricultural Co-operation in Tobacco,” 303. For a full account of the Tobacco Wars of 1904-1906, see Tracy Campbell, \textit{The Politics of Despair}.


tobacco situation and giving a date for his visit. The TGCA was incorporated as a non-stock, non-profit corporation in Raleigh on February 9, 1922. This was the result of two years of dedicated cheerleading, leadership-cultivating and capacity-building by rural leaders. Beginning in 1920, every single issue of Poe’s influential Progressive Farmer ran articles trumpeting the virtues of cooperation, noting especially the success that California fruit and nut growers had achieved in raising the price of their goods. Even before prices “broke” in the fall of 1920, the Progressive Farmer floated the idea of tobacco cooperatives. Poe’s own enthusiasm was influenced by his travels in Europe, where he was particularly impressed with Danish milk co-ops, and by his familiarity with the work of rural sociologists and economists conducted at nearby Chapel Hill and North Carolina State College. Before Sapiro, though, these early overtures lacked specificity, even as they made up for it with an abundance of faith in the moral quality of cooperation—rather than the legal and economic power of the cooperative.

In September of 1920, shortly after the disastrous opening of the tobacco markets, thousands of farmers met in Raleigh to air their grievances and strategize over their future. Recently established through the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the Extension Service was a new government agency that saw the cooperative cause as an opportunity to institutionalize its own mission: to organize rural life through the dissemination of information conducted at the land grant colleges. Extension agents helped to organize the

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74 Clarence Poe to J.Y Joyner, 19 November 1920, Folder 24, Box 2, Tri-State Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association Records (TGCA Records), Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited SHC).
76 Progressive Farmer, 8 May 1920, 21.
Raleigh meeting, and likely explained the basic outlines and benefits of Sapiro’s “California Plan,” and those in attendance pledged their support. A similar meeting was held in the market town of Danville, Virginia, where 5,000 farmers heard the gospel of cooperation. Kentucky and Maryland growers also thumped and planned along similar lines, though ultimately in different organizations. Aside from the most pressing issue of low prices, agricultural reformers explained the pressing need for coordination in sectoral terms. The *Progressive Farmer* optimistically hoped that “the farmers of the South” could learn the lessons of union labor, which had recently “demonstrated in a thousand ways…the power of effective organization.” For rural reformers, organized agriculture was not so different from organized labor. Both should coordinate their market efforts in organizations designed “not for talk but for business. They organize really for the specific purpose of organized marketing—‘collective bargaining’ on what they have for sale, which is their labor.”

The *Progressive Farmer* argued on behalf of economic collectives without ever questioning that the basic orientation of the American economy should serve “business.” Through organization, farmers could simply become better businessmen. That is, farmers were encouraged to organize precisely along the associationalist lines so venerated by Hoover. The Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Co-operative sought to fill agriculture’s institutional void, just as “business” and “labor” had already done. Cooperative boosters hoped that in so doing, both the farmer and national interest would be served.


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Based on the location of the mass meetings—in the “Old Belt” marketing towns of Danville, Virginia and Raleigh, these farmers were likely to be white and less likely to be tenants. Extension service personnel helped to organize the events, which suggests that those present had likely been recognized as “progressive” farmers—men willing to adopt new farm methods, men able enough to be recognized by the itinerant county agents. For the rest of the Cooperative’s existence these demographic factors remained stable: Cooperating members tended to be white smallholders from the Piedmont. Large landowners, concentrated in the Coastal Plain, and, by proxy, their tenants, actively contributed to the Co-op’s demise.

V. “‘Commodity Marketing’ rather than ‘community marketing’ or mere ‘General Farmers’ Organization’”

In the tobacco belt, the Co-op’s success meant undermining the hated auction system entirely. After paying a $3.00 membership fee—frequently written as an IOU—farmers delivered their crop to Cooperative warehouses, where it was weighed and graded by organization officials. Growers received an advance payment, financed through credit extended to the Cooperative, for each grade they delivered. Farmers continued to receive payments throughout the rest of the marketing season in proportion to the amount of tobacco sold, but regardless of the price of each individual leaf brought. 79 Proponents of cooperation argued that if enough crop could be controlled by the organization, and if the crop could be marketed slowly and steadily, then farmers’

79 Undated, Folder 6, Box 1, Ralph Waldo Green Papers, Special Collections Library, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina (hereafter cited NCSU).
supply could meet buyers’ demand on even terms.\textsuperscript{80} As Sapiro put it, “the one great aim of Co-operative marketing is to abolish the individual dumping of farm products and to substitute for it the merchandising of farm products, the controlled movement of crops into the markets of the world at such times and in such quantities that these markets can absorb the crops at fair prices.”\textsuperscript{81}

Controlling the harvest was key, and that meant controlling farmers and their temptation to sell outside the association. Until the TGCA’s dissolution in 1926, local leaders encouraged an incessant membership campaign, shoring up all the communicative reserves of rural communities. Describing the signup campaign as a “crusade,” Carl C. Taylor, a professor of agricultural economics at North Carolina State College, recalled:

Agricultural extension officials, county agents, Smith-Hughes teachers, college professors, publishers of agricultural journals, newspapermen, lawyers, bankers and merchants were used as speakers at local, county and district meetings. In some cases, all stores and other places of business were closed during the mass meetings of farmers at county seats and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{82}

Selecting influential and uncontroversial leadership was also essential. James Yadkin Joyner, former State Education Superintendent, agreed to serve as the organization’s first president. North Carolina Senator Furnifold Simmons and Virginia Senator Claude Swanson pledged their tobacco to the Cooperative.\textsuperscript{83} Words of encouragement from North Carolina governor Cameron Morrison appeared in the *Tri

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\textsuperscript{80} Hanna, “Agricultural Cooperation in Tobacco,” 305.
\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in Woeste, *Farmer’s Benevolent Trust*, 199.
\textsuperscript{82} The Smith Hughes Act of 1917 essentially created the extension service for rural youth. “Smith-Hughes teachers” were instructors at vocational agricultural schools, or leaders of 4-H clubs.
\textsuperscript{83} Tilley, *Bright Tobacco Industry*, 454.
\end{flushright}


State Tobacco Grower, the organization’s newspaper.84 The Raleigh News and Observer, owned by longtime American Tobacco Company-foe Josephus Daniels, and the Richmond Observer championed the organization’s success and denigrated its critics. The TGCA tried to change the political culture of the tobacco belt, tying dignity and respectability to cooperative loyalty. The direct economic benefits of cooperation were only apparent once a critical number of farmers signed up. It was thus imperative that early cooperators—the pioneers of economic reorganization in their communities—believed that they were getting something out of cooperation, be it status, righteousness, or freedom from the censure and scorn of their communities.

The fear of community scorn, and its legal consequences, was essential to the association’s operation. As Victoria Saker Woest has persuasively demonstrated in her study of the California Raisin Growers’ Cooperative, the Sapiro method of cooperation relied on a large degree of legal coercion.85 Sapiro touched the lives of bright belt tobacco growers through the law in two ways. First, he devised a model statute that was presented at state legislatures around the country, and which North Carolina passed in 1921. By 1928, 38 states had legalized agricultural commodity monopolies. Freeing farmers from anti-trust laws could not solve the overproduction problem, and it created a new kind of collective action problem. But bold state enforcement of marketing restrictions was yet unthinkable in the associationalist 1920s. Secondly, Sapiro was the legal strategist behind the “iron-clad” contracts that bound members to the Co-op for five years. The TGCA pursued a vigorous and ultimately self-destructive policy of contract enforcement,

84 “Governor Morrison of North Carolina Sends Message to All Tobacco Growers,” Tri-State Tobacco Grower, March 1922, 4.
85 See Woeste, Farmer’s Benevolent Trust, chapter 9.
bringing lawsuits against hundreds of contract breakers. When the Co-op entered receivership in 1926, more than 800 cases against disloyal members were abandoned.

The Association was quick to brandish its litigiousness as a weapon of deterrence. The Tri-State Tobacco Grower frequently published articles gloating over the Association’s courtroom success against farmers. A news release from 1922 is characteristic:

It takes a long time to reach all contract breakers and court actions are slow, but after our association gets through with contract breakers they will hesitate a long time before breaking faith again with our 80,000 loyal members who have had enough of the auction gang, and are banded together for a square deal and fair prices every year. ⁸⁶

Members were also instructed to police their local associations and to report contract breakers to the association’s legal department. “You can do your part in this collection work by helping the collection agent find every man in his territory,” members were told. “Loyal members can help by giving information in detail concerning all violators.” ⁸⁷ The wisdom of this strategy may be doubted, but its principles were affirmed in the legislatures and courts. The North Carolina Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the state’s marketing act in 1921. And while many of the suits initiated by the TGCA against non-cooperating members were settled out of court, the association won nearly all of its legal battles. ⁸⁸

The TGCA could hardly have constructed a more hospitable legal atmosphere for its activities. The North Carolina Supreme Court rendered the broadest ruling in the

⁸⁷ “News Letter,” April 2, 1923, Folder 40, Box 3, Folder, TGCA Records, SHC.
⁸⁸ Tilley, Bright Tobacco Industry, 456.
nation on the constitutionality of the Sapiro-made Marketing Act. In its 1923 *Tobacco Growers’ Co-operative Association v. Jones* decision, members were deemed within their rights to vigorously pursue contract breakers because they were taking “all the risks”:

They are asking no assistance from the public treasury. They are forcing no one to join, and they are exacting no inordinate prices for their product. They are associating themselves as authorized by the statute, like other persons, and they have signed mutual and fair agreements among themselves which will be futile unless those who have signed such agreements can be held to abide by the terms of their contracts.  

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The tobacco association was, in short, “the most hopeful movement ever inaugurated to obtain justice for and improve the financial condition of farmers.”  

Clarence Poe, the indefatigable booster of cooperation in his *Progressive Farmer*, could not have put it better himself.

Though Woeste has pointed out that a “revolution in cooperative marketing” happened in the legal environments of particular states, the TGCA also fit easily into a broader political economy of entrepreneurial self-help that encouraged the formation of farmers’ cooperatives. With the support of the Farm Bloc, the USDA, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and President Warren G. Harding, the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 freed farmer co-ops from most provisions of the Sherman and Clayton anti-trust acts. Dubbed cooperation’s “Magna Carta,” Capper-Volstead legalized farmer use of the corporate form for commodity marketing organizations, allowing producers to gather “into concentrations, consolidate marketing operations, and exert control over prices short of ‘unduly enhancing’ them.”

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90 Woeste, Farmer’s Benevolent Trust, 203-206.
91 Ibid., 232-233.
Federal encouragement of cooperatives also came in the form of direct financing through the War Finance Corporation (WFC), which granted the TGCA $30 million in loans which it used to pay growers’ advances before the first sale of the marketing season.\(^9\(^2\) According to Agriculture Department records, during the peak of association activity from 1921-1923, the WFC loaned more money to tobacco cooperatives than to any other commodity groups, save cotton and livestock organizations.\(^9\(^3\) The TGCA also successfully secured lines of credit from the National City Bank of New York, as well as local banks. Correspondence from the early days of the Co-op’s existence revealed a particular emphasis on enlisting business and banking support for the farmers’ venture. Local commerce, association officials reasoned, should have been sympathetic to the movement because they “depend largely upon and are vitally interested in the success of the producer.”\(^9\(^4\) The appointment of Oliver Sands, President of the Bank of Richmond, as Director of the TGCA was widely regarded as a point of prestige for the organization—a step toward getting farming on a business footing in the marketplace.

With sound legal and financial backing, and the enthusiastic support of local and national leaders, it seemed, in the words of the *Tri-State Tobacco Grower*, that “Every real Big Man in the United States is in favor of Co-operative marketing. Only ‘pinhookers’ and men who make money out of the ‘auction’ system are against it. Any

\(^9\(^3\) Credit-Credit Union, Folder—“War Finance Corporation”, Box 7, General Correspondence, Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 83, National Records and Archives Administration-II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited NARA-II). BAE records indicate that livestock Co-ops borrowed 99.9 million; cotton Co-operatives 81.8 million; tobacco Co-operatives 52.5 million; grain Co-operatives, 36.79 million, and sugar beet Co-operatives 11.46 million.
\(^9\(^4\) Oliver Sands to John Hutcheson, 13 May 1921, Folder 20, Box 2, TGCA Records, SHC.
grower who does not sign up is helping the enemy of the farmers. Tell them to fight
WITH you and not against you. Sign them up before it’s too late.”

But big men, little men and middlemen fought the organization. Structural factors
and poor management, too, contributed to its ultimate demise in 1926. First, despite the
legal apparatus enabling the Co-op to act like a trust, it never came close to achieving
monopoly control over the handling of the tobacco crop. The chart below illustrates the
Association’s declining percentage of deliveries handled.

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<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Crop Controlled</th>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
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Sapiroism worked well enough in California, where production expansion by fruit
and nut growers could only be achieved through considerable capital investment.
Tobacco acreage, on the other hand, could be increased with little more than a promise of
a share of the crop. The capital requirements of sharecropping tobacco were virtually
non-existent, but the pounds of tobacco produced by sharecroppers and tenants were real
enough to undermine the cooperative’s monopoly control of the harvest. Indeed, during
the TGCA’s operation, tobacco acreage was rapidly expanding in Georgia, which was not
even organized under the cooperative plan. Farmers in Georgia, like new entrants into
the tobacco field across the rest of the South, frequently turned to tobacco because they
were not making any money farming cotton. The idea of a commodity cooperative

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95 Tri-State Tobacco Grower, June 1922, 1. Emphasis and capitalization in the original.
96 Tilley, Bright Tobacco Industry, 152-154.
presupposed some stability in the number of farmers for any given commodity. But it was impossible to control the harvest of rapidly expanding commercial cultivation. Across much of the southeast, it was common for farmers in all tenure categories, from landowners down to sharecroppers, to grow both cotton and tobacco. For this reason, it may have been impossible for the TGCA to even have known if it was controlling the majority of tobacco produced.97

Though the law empowered the Association to sue for damages for pledged crops undelivered, it could not force anybody to join the association in the first place. In fact, tenants could frequently be coerced by their creditors into not joining the Association. Debt-holders needed lump-sum payments, provided under the auction method, to pay their creditors; the smaller, multiple advances paid by the Association were not sufficient to free growers of debt, however temporarily. Indebted farmers who did pledge their crop to the association were subject to lawsuits by their creditors. One letter from a tenant-member explained his situation as follows:

I owe one man two hundred dollars for cashe bond me in cultivating my crop and he hase a mortgage on my crop for his security and I owe a second man for guano [fertilizer] and suplies to the amount of four hundred dollars and my guano note is due before my mortgage and the man who holds the mortgage will not releace my stuff for the note and my advances is so small they will not take cuare of both and if I cant get some help or releace the guano man will enter suite at once for his money knowing if I had put my stuff on the open market I could have paid both when due.98

97 Indeed, flue-cured tobacco cultivation was spreading particularly rapidly in South Carolina during the years of the Tri-State’s operation. Eldred E. Prince and Robert R. Simpson, Long Green: The Rise and Fall of Tobacco in South Carolina (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).
Even landlords who were themselves members of the organization disputed the right of their tenants and debtors to pledge their crops, believing that they were owed payment in full. One merchant-landlord described his dissatisfaction at the “widow’s mite” of an advance. “Please let me urge you to pay nothing if you cannot pay three to five times the original advance,” the landlord, who was also a member of the Association, wrote officials. “Lots of people with whom I do business owe me. They need the money and I need the money.”

The Association took a hard line against overextended tenants, informing creditors that tenants “have agreed in writing to deliver to the Association all tobacco raised by them. It is up to them to make the necessary arrangements with creditors and landlords to enable them to carry out this agreement.” If creditors or tenants sold pledged tobacco at auction in an attempt to pay down debt, they would be found “in breach of the tenants’ contracts” and subject to suit. There was thus an incentive to prevent tenants from becoming members of the Cooperative. Unsurprisingly, the greatest amount of contract breaking occurred in North Carolina’s tenant-heavy Coastal Plain. Association officials knew from the beginning that the structure of the Co-op placed a particularly onerous burden on tenants, even if their only strategy was the dogged pursuit of disloyalty. As it was put in a 1921 letter to the Association’s director, “Our greatest problems seem now to center around these six letters: T-E-N-A-N-T.”

Warehouse owners, themselves sometimes creditors and always threatened by the Cooperative, actively campaigned for the Association’s demise. Auction house owners

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99 Quoted in Ibid., 8.
100 W.T. Joyner to A.J. Davis, 12 December 1922, Folder 38, Box 3, TGCA Records, SHC.
101 John R. Hutcheson to M.O. Wilson, 19 November 1921, Folder 24, Box 2, Tri-State Tobacco Growers Association Records, SHC.
made contract breaking even more attractive by making sure that defecting farmers sometimes received more for their crop than the Co-op was offering. Warehousemen also fomented suspicion and gossip by alleging malfeasance on the part of TGCA officials. Detractors rarely missed an opportunity to comment on the Association’s “California Jew” lawyer, its high-salaried employees, and the profits a few officials made on the re-drying of members’ tobacco.\textsuperscript{102}

The allegation of mismanagement held some traction. The Association paid for the use of re-drying plants owned and operated by two of its directors. While the re-drying charges may have been standard, the two officials nevertheless made a hefty profit off the venture.\textsuperscript{103} By 1925 Clarence Poe, the great cheerleader of the grower cooperation, could only muster whimpering, half-apologetic enthusiasm to demoralized and increasingly disloyal members. “Now to us the most encouraging thing about the… Association,” Poe wrote, “is that while it does make some mistakes (who would expect a brand new sort of organization not to?), it does learn from its mistakes.”\textsuperscript{104} These missteps exacted a high price in terms of membership loyalty. Controlling an ever-dwindling proportion of the crop, the Association literally could not afford to make mistakes.

Finally, even if the law empowered the Co-op to force members to deliver, it could not force buyers to buy. As a commodity, tobacco was fundamentally different than fruit and nuts, Sapiro’s cooperative showpieces. Manufacturers kept several years’ worth of tobacco in storage, an unspecified amount of leaf of unspecified grade—grades that

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\textsuperscript{102} & Tilley, \textit{Bright Tobacco Industry}, 469-472. \\
\textsuperscript{103} & Hanna, “Agricultural Cooperation in Tobacco,” 319; Ibid., 468. \\
\textsuperscript{104} & “Tobacco Association Goes Forward,” \textit{Progressive Farmer}, 17 January 1925, 4. \\
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\end{footnotesize}
were themselves vague and unstable. For instance, the Imperial Tobacco Company and the American Tobacco Company simply did not patronize the Association. R.J. Reynolds and Liggett and Meyers were notable among the big firms for making any large purchases from it.  

The opacity and asymmetry of the tobacco market meant that virtually no amount of cooperation could force the companies to bargain.

An enumeration of the Association’s failures and the insurmountable difficulties it faced is a rejoinder to historians who have assessed the Co-op’s demise as a result of the individualistic inclinations of “uneducated and suspicious farmers” who believed “rumors and gossip.” A more realistic appraisal of the Co-operative looks toward the dynamics between historical actors and their institutions and less toward their supposedly essential characteristics. An eye toward the economic dynamics that encouraged non-cooperation actually suggests that non-joining was the most “rational” act for any individual farmer. Economist Mancur Olson characterized some public goods as generating a “free-rider” problem—a scenario in which some individuals receive the benefits of a service while others bear the cost. For tobacco growers, the public good was the higher price bargained by the cooperative. All tobacco growers—members or not—obtained the benefit of higher prices achieved by the Association. Given this paradox—that only individually irrational choices can produce a collectively rational outcome—it is hardly surprising that the Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative failed to meet tobacco companies on even terms. What is surprising is that it succeeded for as long as it did.

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VI. The Institutions of Failure

Even failure leaves a mark. The Association anticipated New Deal social, political economy in two ways. First, in successfully defeating the Cooperative, large landowners and warehousemen swung the political center of gravity toward the Eastern part of the tobacco belt. Their support, and curtailed acreage, was crucial for the success of the supply reduction policies of the New Deal. The cooperative’s failure highlighted what was needed in order for agricultural reforms to succeed: landlords had to believe that government alliance served them. Secondly, the process of organizing and administering the Co-op necessitated a crucial expansion of institutional capacity within the Extension Service and the Co-op’s “locals”—the county-level clubs that sustained the neighborly feeling of cooperation. This last point deserves further elaboration because it enriches our understanding of pre-New Deal bureaucratic development. Associationalism in the countryside produced power dynamics, and their institutional conduits. The New Deal intensified these but did not create them.

The Tri-State Tobacco Growers Cooperative would never have existed if not for the dogged efforts of the Extension Service, particularly in Virginia. Relying on their pre-established relationships with the “best” local farmers, extension agents used these networks to establish the 1800 locals that formed the basic units of cooperative organization. Extension officials were undoubtedly aided in their quest to sign up farmers to the Association by the fact they bore the seal of the government, and were generally seen by farmers as helpful to their interests. This would be unsurprising if not for the fact that top USDA officials—starting with Secretary of Agriculture Wallace—had explicitly told extension officials not to assist the cooperative movement beyond the mere provision
of information. As Wallace put it in an address to the National Co-operative Marketing Conference in 1924: “There are limits beyond which the Department cannot properly pass in the field of organization of cooperative associations… It is no more a part of the duty of the Department to engage in the work of organization than it is a part of [its] duty to go into the fields and plow, sow or reap.”

John R. Hutcheson, Extension Director in Virginia, went into the fields, and the Association reaped the benefit. After reading Poe’s editorializing on the merits of farmer cooperatives in 1920, Hutcheson contacted Poe and alerted to him to efforts already made by Virginia extension agents in organizing tobacco growers. Hutcheson, already convinced that “the California plan offers more than any other at the present time,” encouraged Poe to attend a farmers’ meeting at Danville that he had organized. In some sense, Hutcheson founded the Tri-State Co-op.

In planning the initial November 1920 meeting with Aaron Sapiro, Poe insisted to would-be president Joyner that Hutcheson be present. Poe described Hutcheson as a man possessing “an interest in all marketing problems [who] can help us as few other men can.” A few other Extension men were already helping in an official capacity. In the same letter, Poe noted that North Carolina’s Extension Director, B.W. Kilgore, was already on the “executive committee” of the yet-unformed organization. The Director of the Tobacco Experiment Station at Oxford, North Carolina later served as the secretary of the Association.

109 John R. Hutcheson to Clarence Poe, 18 October 1920, Folder 1, Box 1, TGCA Records, SHC.
110 Clarence Poe to JY Joyner, 19 November 1920, Folder 24, Box 2, TGCA Records, SHC.
111 Idem.
That same month, Hutcheson engaged in extensive back-and-forth correspondence with Henry C. Taylor, chief of the Bureau of Crop Estimates and Bureau of Markets, and later the first chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics when the department was organized in 1922. Dubbed the “Dean of Agricultural Economics,” Taylor was probably the Department of Agriculture’s greatest proponent of farmer organization. Yet in correspondence with Hutcheson, he clearly took a more measured approach. To Taylor’s discomfort with Sapiro’s idea of monopoly control over the crop, Hutcheson asked, “Are not the five great packing companies monopolies? Are not the four big tobacco companies of this Country monopolies?...Are there not a number of other organizations that practically set the price paid farmers for their products?” Hutcheson demanded to know whether Taylor “honestly believe[d] that the laws of supply and demand operate more freely at present than they would if the farmers had commodity monopolies for marketing their products?”\footnote{Hutcheson to Taylor, 17 November 1920, Folder 1, Box 1, TGCA Records, SHC.}

Taylor responded to Hutcheson’s impassioned tone with what came to be a standard USDA refrain on cooperation: education. “I should say the right answering” of Hutcheson’s barrage of questions should lie in “clarify[ing] the minds of farmers on…marketing.” “What is needed,” Taylor continued, “is a careful description of the marketing processes, showing the points at which monopoly charges may enter, the ways in which these can be avoided… and then leave to private initiative that which can be done more satisfactorily on that basis.”\footnote{Taylor to Hutcheson, 19 November 1920, Folder 1, Box 1, TGCA Records, SHC.} But Hutcheson implored Taylor to go beyond such platitudes, arguing “fighting the organized handlers’ of farmers products with the same kind of instruments which they use may be, in the long run, somewhat dangerous,
but I believe it is more effective than simply standing out for righteous principles.”

Indicting the government for allowing large corporations to operate as effective (if not technical) monopolies, Hutcheson insisted that farmers be allowed to use the methods of big business and organized labor. “I believe thoroughly in standing out for righteous principles, but if the mere standing out does not bring results, the farmer must be in the position to use more forceful methods.” In closing, Hutcheson urged Taylor’s Bureau of Markets to do more than merely describe marketing processes and to work for “practical plans for marketing farm products.”

By way of ending their extended epistolary relationship, Taylor ultimately concluded that, “any argument between us would relate to the methods of gaining the end.”

By his own admission, Hutcheson’s method included fighting “the devil with fire,” and he clearly envisioned the Extension Service as sparking the cooperative venture. When his friend and fellow Virginian Monroe Wilson was appointed director of the TGCA’s signup campaign, Hutcheson gained a receptive and impressionable ear within the organization. Hutcheson had been Wilson’s professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and though the men were in frequent and intimate contact, their letters never shed this master-student dynamic. For instance, Hutcheson urged Wilson to “have your best foot foremost” at a meeting in which Sapiro was set to address local bankers. The Extension Director contacted local bankers himself, inquiring as to the possibility of the Association receiving financing. Indeed, even before he accepted the Directorship of the Tri-State Co-op, Richmond banker Oliver Sands had already corresponded with

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114 Hutcheson to Taylor, 22 November 1920, Folder 1, Box 1, TGCA Records, SHC.
115 Taylor to Hutcheson, 24 November 1920, Folder 2, Box 1, TGCA Records, SHC.
116 Hutcheson to Taylor, 22 November 1920, Folder 1, Box 1, TGCA Records, SHC.
117 Hutcheson to M.O. Wilson, 11 June 1921, Folder 20, Box 2; Hutcheson to Taylor, 22 November 1920, Box 1, Folder 1, TGCA Records, SHC.
When Sands accepted as the TGCA’s director, Hutcheson wrote with congratulations, and described the Virginia Extension Service as having done “as much towards the organization of the Tobacco Growers’ Co-operative Association as any other agency.” Under Hutcheson’s aegis, Extension put “farmers in touch with the leading cooperative marketing associations in the United States, helped them draw up their contract, and then helped them get the sign up.” Viewing the fate of Extension and the TGCA as co-dependent, Hutcheson assured the new director that “the Virginia Extension Division stands ready to aid the Tobacco Growers’ Co-operative Association in every way possible.” The agricultural bureaucracy was ready to incorporate the TGCA’s private goals as its own.

Structurally, the Extension Service was well-poised to reach up to national figures, and to reach down to the grassroots. Hutcheson did both, recruiting Sapiro to stump for Co-operation in the tobacco-growing districts, and emphasizing the importance of the local county organizations. Hutcheson was in frequent contact with the notoriously temperamental Sapiro, acting as a cultural go-between, massaging Sapiro’s ego, clarifying the local point of view, hoping to get what would be good for tobacco growers. Beginning a letter to Sapiro with a bit of flattery—“I heard a number of men who have heard you several times say that [your recent address] was the best…they had ever heard…and I am about ready to agree with them”—Hutcheson counseled patience with rural southern folk. “You must remember that very few of the businessmen or the farmers in these cooperatives have had the opportunity of studying the methods which you are

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118 Oliver Sands to Hutcheson, 13 May 1921, Folder 20, Box 2, TGCA Records, SHC.
119 Hutcheson to Sands, 30 March 1922, Box 2, Folder, 27 TGCA Records, SHC.
120 Idem.
advocating,” he wrote. “Fewer still know you intimately enough to appreciate exactly what you are trying to do.” At the same time, Hutcheson assured Sapiro that he personally believed “you are thoroughly in earnest and in most cases, absolutely right.”

Perhaps because the Extension Service relied heavily on personal connections with progressive farmers and local leaders, Hutcheson was insistent that the TGCA develop strong local associations to counteract anti-Association “propaganda” and rumors. Since the Farm Bureau was particularly weak in the tobacco belt, the Co-op had to largely build these units from scratch. Marshalling his familiarity with “farmers’ psychology,” Hutcheson urged Sands, the city banker-cum-director, to make “local and county organizations” a priority for the Board of Directors. Hutcheson repeatedly pressed the Board of Directors to send regular updates on the organization’s affairs to the chairman of the county local in order to promote transparency and loyalty. “Our farmers are asking a great many questions at the present that the warehousemen are not in a position to answer. Someone should answer these questions if we expect the farmers to remain satisfied and loyal, he wrote.”

At Hutcheson’s suggestion, Wilson was made a “field service agent”—something akin to an extension agent in the employ of the organization. His primary task was dispelling rumors and keeping up morale. In his new position, Wilson’s notes to himself reveal further reliance on the Extension Service for organizational guidance and resources. Wilson hoped to make locals function with Extension Service assistance in “the preparation of all programs,” “having” their demonstrators put on the local programs,” “helping the association advertise county

121 Hutcheson to Sapiro, 21 August 1922, Folder 28, Box 2, TGCA Records, SHC.
122 Hutcheson to Sands, 9 October 1922, Folder 32, Box 3, TGCA Records, SHC.
123 Hutcheson to Sands, 31 October 1922, Folder 34, Box 3, TGCA Records, SHC.
meetings,” and “helping Field Service in getting strong program committee.”124 This institutionalizing of Extension Service favoritism toward prominent growers was an important legacy of the Tri-State Co-op. Over the next decade, the growers would change, but the governing form—the incorporation of selected growers’ efforts into the machinery of government—would remain. The TGCA’s deep indebtedness to the efforts of Extension agents demonstrates that the New Deal did not originate the government-sponsored revolution in the countryside. For at least a decade, government officials had been trying to contour the relationship between landowners, tenants, and manufacturers in order to give producers more power in the market. And the organizational structure, developed through the Association and aided by Extension officials, fed directly into the county-unit system through which the AAA was administered.

The operation of the Extension Service in tobacco country also elaborates political scientist Daniel Carpenter’s thesis on bureaucratic entrepreneurialism. Carpenter holds up the USDA as an example of an agency with a reputation for “talent, cohesion and efficiency,” which enabled it to “build manifold coalitions around [its] favored programs and innovations.”125 Carpenter argues that the development of organizational capacity within Extension Service, particularly in the South, inaugurated “a broad and conscious pattern of deference to the Department of Agriculture” on the part of lawmakers, such as Iowa Senator and “farm bloc” don William S. Kenyon, who looked to the Department for the creation of policy.126 Powerful though he was in agrarian circles, Kenyon “sought information about congressional appropriations from an executive

124 “Let’s Make Them Function—How?” Undated (1924), Folder 47, Box 4, TGCA Records, SHC.
125 Carpenter, Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy, 5.
126 Ibid., 243.
agency,” demonstrating “how severely Congress had begun to depend on the Department for information about agricultural policy in the Progressive Era.” Kenyon also noted, unalarmed, that the USDA was managing Extension according to its “own initiative.”

For Carpenter, Congressional deference to an increasingly strong bureaucracy—frequently at the expense of Congresses’ own power—is essentially the definition of bureaucratic autonomy. But as the free operation of the Extension Service in the tobacco belt shows, bureaucracies themselves are too heterogeneous to be described as singularly autonomous. Digging even deeper into Carpenter’s concept of a bureaucratic pocket shows how seemingly low-level actors can have an outsized influence on the development of organizational capacity. In his recruitment of Aaron Sapiro, his behind-the-scenes lobbying for state legislation, and his encouragement of Extension support for the cooperative campaign, Hutcheson went further than many Washington-based USDA officials thought appropriate. The Extension Service had itself had achieved autonomy from its parent bureaucracy. This legacy, as much as any other, was evident in the New Deal’s tobacco section administration.

**Conclusion: Toward Commodity Corporatism**

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128 Idem.
During the 1920s, national agricultural policy was ineffective at raising prices and farm income, and incoherent in its vision for agricultural organization analogous to that of labor and business. But that did not mean that the agricultural sector was stagnant. Farmers everywhere grasped at the straws extended to them by the government. They formed cooperatives, took out low-interest loans when they could, and began to turn to the expertise of the extension service. The government, agricultural reformers and the rural farm press urged tobacco farmers to harness their power in the marketplace—power that could only come from operating collectively and forcing buyers to accept higher prices. But these endeavors failed. Tobacco growers’ cooperative efforts were undermined by the superior power and organization of the tobacco companies, and their own “disloyalty” to the cooperative—disloyalty born out of poverty and a desperate need for the cash-on-demand that the auction market offered. The auction house remained the quaintest site of economic oppression in the tobacco belt. Every sale the auctioneer chanted sang of tobacco growers’ radical disempowerment vis-à-vis tobacco buyers.

But the process of founding the Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative Association left a legacy deeper than neighborly recriminations. Working on behalf of the cooperative, perhaps nearly as hopeful as the most loyal of members to see it succeed, the Extension Service developed its own institutional capacity. County-by-county, extension agents corralled farmers, preaching to them the virtues of cooperation, helping to make their economic needs visible not only to tobacco companies, but also to themselves. Absent the kind of production restriction ushered in by the New Deal, this new relationship between growers and government did not make farmers’ lives materially
better. But through the crucible of economic defeat by superiorly organized forces, growers and the agricultural bureaucracy began to form a corporate whole.
Chapter 2: 
Agrarian Democracy as American Corporatism

Weeks before newly inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Agricultural Adjustment Act into law, Clarence Poe used his *Progressive Farmer* newspaper to go on record with his own suggestions for rural reform. 

“As everybody knows, we are in strong favor of organization by tobacco farmers,” Poe wrote. “We also feel that any projected organization should be the work of leading growers and experts in the field of agricultural cooperation.” Poe implicitly learned the lesson of the failure of the Tri-State Cooperative: it was impossible to overhaul the important features of the tobacco economy—production and marketing—without the support of the large growers in eastern North Carolina. But the cooperative’s failure did not make a full agricultural aristocrat of Poe. Any plan for agricultural reform needed to have an element of democracy in which plans would be “subjected to the corrective of group judgment, in accordance with the best wisdom of the group, and then presented to growers with the backing or criticism of competent judges.”

Though tweaked to align with the preferences of leaders in Washington and North Carolina, Poe’s vision for the tobacco belt would remain remarkably intact, braiding together three essential elements of organization: social hierarchy, government assistance, and popular ratification.

This chapter argues that the New Deal’s Agricultural Adjustment Act incorporated tobacco farmers into the government. By following how planners and farmers understood and responded to the promise of direct state interventions in tobacco market, this chapter reframes analytical debates about the nature of the New Deal state. I

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argue that the political economy of tobacco production should be understood neither as “state centered” or “pluralist.” When we follow the logic and efforts of farmers at organization, we arrive at hybrid organizations: empowered by the state, yet decentralized and ratified by popular vote. The units of market and social control in the tobacco-producing regions of North Carolina are best understood as corporatist—an interpretive framework regrettably foreign to most analyses of American political economy. During the New Deal, planners responsible for the tobacco provisions of agricultural adjustment demanded organization from farmers. Farmers were licensed to produce tobacco, which transformed them into a non-competitive interest group at the auction market, and a coherent bloc for their congressmen. Originally implemented as an emergency measure, highly regulated organization was embedded within the state as farmers came to serve as program administrators. Beyond requiring farmer participation in program administration, the agricultural adjustment was overlaid with the patina of democracy as farmers ratified tobacco policy every three years in a referendum. For tobacco farmers, there was no greater defense of the federal tobacco program than their own participation within it.2

I. The Corporatist Fusion of State and Society

2 In full, political scientists Philippe Schmitter defines corporatism as: “a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered, and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.” Philippe C. Schmitter, “Still the Century of Corporatism?” Review of Politics 36, no. 1 (1974): 93-94. Elsewhere Schmitter and co-author Wolfgang Streeck note the effect of associational statecraft in allowing groups to represent “their interests vis-à-vis other categories and the polity at large.” Wolfgang Streeck and Schmitter eds., Private Interest Government: Beyond Market and State (London: Sage Publications, 1985), vii.
The agriculture planners ultimately responsible for the Agricultural Adjustment Act looked beyond the nation’s borders as they searched for remedies for their sick sector. It is ironic then that agriculture has been held up by political theorists as exemplary of uniquely American processes of state-building. As historian William Novak has noted, “temporal accounts and historical assumptions pervade the literature” on regulation in America. Political scientists probing the nature of the relationship between the government and civil society in America have, perhaps, reflected disciplinary and temporal biases toward an exceptionalist vision of America, answering, by way of regulatory exposition, Werner Sombart’s old canard: “Why is there no socialism in America?” The answers provided by historians and political scientists have generally fallen in two camps: on the one hand, pluralists who affirm the “weak state” premise of American exceptionalism; at its critical edge, pluralism holds out the dark possibility of “capture” or, in the words of “Chicago school” economist George Stigler, the tendency for regulation to become “acquired by the industry” and operate “primarily for its benefit.” On the other hand, many scholars, particularly historians, have disputed the “myth of the weak state,” as detailed examinations of specific bureaucratic agencies have revealed the capacity of the American state to “intervene autonomously” upon civil

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society through the use of "knowledgeable administrative organizations." Scholars have found in agriculture support for both a weak state and strong state vision of American governance.

The federal tobacco program is best understood as an example of American corporatism—a solidifying of the state-society bond that had been building since the 1920s. Corporatism refers to the formalized, institutionalized involvement of interest groups in government decision-making. It differs from the idea of regulatory capture in that organizational involvement is constitutive of policymaking, and not a perversion of good government; while conceptually kindred in acknowledging the state’s role as more

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8 Grant McConnell’s Decline of American Democracy and Charles Hardin’s The Politics of Agriculture amply demonstrated farm organization “capture” of the extension service and the USDA. Thirty years later, historical sociologists argued that state power has been “more causally significant” than interest group power in producing “policy outcomes.” Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold argued that the Agricultural Adjustment Administration “ended up being successfully institutionalized” during the New Deal, highlighting the agricultural bureaucracy’s sources of “state capacity,” particularly the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. For Skocpol and Finegold, the USDA was already an agency of government with extraordinary capacity to formulate and implement domestic economic and social policies.” Charles M Hardin, The Politics of Agriculture; Soil Conservation and the Struggle for Power in Rural America (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1952); Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953); McConnell, Private Power & American Democracy (New York: Knopf, 1966); Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, “State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal,” Political Science Quarterly 97, no. 2 (1982): 255-278; Kenneth Finegold, State and Party in America’s New Deal (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Brian. Balogh, “The State of the State among Historians,” Social Science History 27, no. 3 (2003): 455-463; Daniel P. Carpenter, The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). Very frequently, historians have accepted the view that the state operates autonomously. As Alan Brinkley has put it, “both supporters and critics have, more often than not, portrayed the New Deal as the product of institutions and impulses within the government (and within the Roosevelt administration).” Alan Brinkley, Liberalism and Its Discontents (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
than a mere mediator of private interests, corporatism differs from state-centered accounts of American political development in that the state is seen as actively seeking and encouraging the participation of organized interests in pursuit of policy goals precisely because of its incapacity to do so by fiat. Corporatism asks us to sideline the strong/weak dichotomy in favor of looking at the broadest functions of government-civil society interactions. Where and by whom do decisions about the tobacco market get made? Where do ideas about economic organization come from? What groups or individuals are responsible for executing these ideas? How do tobacco farmers understand their own role within these processes?

Corporatism is associated with fascism, which is why many historians of the United States have been reluctant to embrace the term. During the 1930s, Portuguese and Italian political theorists articulated a social doctrine that sought to sublimate conflict into the “superior interests of the nation” through “collaboration between classes, and [the] acceptance of the idea that the semi-autonomous bodies representing various branches of social activity should be given formal powers in defining policies, in order to fulfill the main objective of obtaining social harmony and political stability.”

In their ideal form, these economic arrangements—such as industrial cartelization and business-government collaboration—had an expansive moral dimension in which “the fulfillment of self-interest can only be reached through the implementation of the national

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interest”—a contrast to the individualistic, selfish imperatives assumed by classical capitalist relations. The antecedents of this social vision—a moral economy of harmony and a political economy of sectorally integrated coordination—can be found, in part, in the anti-communist encyclicals of the Catholic Church. The 1891 Rerum Novarum and the 1931 Quadrasgesimo Anno provided a natural law justification for a political economy that equally rejected classless Marxism and unbridled capitalism. The former doctrine idealized the organization of medieval guild societies, and the latter affirmed the autonomy of organized economic sectors.\textsuperscript{11} Later, perhaps with a patronizing undertone of essentialism, some scholars of Latin America detected an affinity between the less-developed and more Catholic states of Portugal, Spain, Chile, and Brazil, on the one hand, and authoritarian economic cartelization, on the other.\textsuperscript{12} Between corporatism’s medieval imaginary, continental origins, Catholic leanings, fascist affinities, and Latin American experiments, it is little wonder that the concept is considered external to the American political tradition. Indeed, as Louis Hartz, one of the most eloquent spokesmen of American exceptionalism, put it:

Europe and the fragment world would easily redeem Roosevelt from the authoritarian charge leveled against him, in terms of either right or left. In this context his “Americanism” would clearly have stood out, even if he had been bold enough to be philosophical. No one could confuse the New Deal with the “creole fascism” of Latin America or the “clerical fascism,” as some of the British-Canadian newspapers called it, of the French-Canadian right. Even if we turn to

\textsuperscript{11} Howard J. Wiarda, Catholic Roots and Democratic Flowers Political Systems in Spain and Portugal (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 94.
\textsuperscript{12} For instance, political scientist Howard Wiarda begins his analysis of the political economy of Spain and Portugal with the observation that “some of the defining factors which are relevant to Protestant northern Europe and the United States…may not be as central to democratic rule in Spain and Portugal as earlier conceived.” Howard J. Wiarda, Catholic Roots and Democratic Flowers Political Systems in Spain and Portugal (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 3. See also Fredrick B. Pike, The New Corporatism; Social-political Structures in the Iberian World (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974).
“reformist” dictatorships in Latin America… Roosevelt emerges an obvious liberal.\textsuperscript{13}

And yet, as Daniel Rodgers has amply demonstrated, American “liberalism” has been politically, if not theologically, catholic. Rexford Tugwell described agriculture under Mussolini as “the cleanest, neatest, and most effectively operated piece of social machinery I’ve ever seen.”\textsuperscript{14} M.L. Wilson, the originator of the domestic allotment system of supply restriction, was fond of the kind of organic metaphors for society and history that may have resonated with Europeans looking for usable aspects of the medieval past. To assess agricultural adjustment, he asserted, you had to “consider not only the economics involved, but also political science, the historical trends, and the sociology.” Agriculture was just a part of a great “living, growing organism;” understanding agriculture as separate from the whole body politic could be about as fruitful as trying to “tell about the living dynamic functionings of the body by separating and dissecting an arm.”\textsuperscript{15} And, as is well-acknowledged by historians, New Deal industrial policy practiced by the National Recovery Administration was highly coordinated—,cartelizing the oil industry, establishing codes of fair competition, and incorporating business and labor into the policymaking process.\textsuperscript{16} Yet even Donald

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Louis Hartz, \textit{The Founding of New Societies; Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia} (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1964), 112.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Quoted in Rodgers, \textit{Atlantic Crossings}, 420. See also, Rodger Shaw, “Fascism and the New Deal,” \textit{The North American Review} 238, no. 6 (1934): 559–564.
\end{itemize}
Brand, whose *Corporatism and the Rule of Law* masterfully elaborated the NRA as an experiment in American corporatism, concluded that its demise in the Supreme Court’s *Schechter Poultry Corp.* decision rested largely on the fact that “societal corporatism” was essentially outside of American political culture.\(^\text{17}\)

But even looking beyond the ideological influence of corporatist ideas on New Deal-era reform efforts, we find corporatism in practice in tobacco organization. The deep pride that tobacco growers felt in their participation in the federal tobacco program—their ratification of the program through referenda and their despair when the Supreme Court jeopardized crop control in the *United States v. Butler* decision—suggests that corporatism was very much within the American political repertoire.

### II. Eastern North Carolina: From Sabotage to Support

Seven years of faltering attempts to subvert the auction system through cooperative marketing had made two facts plain: government-on-the-ground was willing to help organize farmers, and prominent farmers and warehouse owners were unwilling to relinquish the basis of their prosperity, the auction, for the unproven panacea of cooperation. The breathless staccato of the auctioneer’s chant was the soundtrack to the uneven economic development of tobacco country. The auction market’s unpredictable nature meant that a handful of growers could prosper—particularly if they were friendly with the warehouse owner—even as other farmers faltered, regardless of broader forces of supply and demand. Indeed, the experience of the Tri-State Coop, with its perverse

incentives toward “disloyalty,” illustrated that some growers could prosper because their neighbors “failed” by staying true to the cooperative. The vigorous anti-cooperative propaganda campaign waged by the Wilson *Daily Times* was suggestive of the geographic interests at stake in maintaining the auction system.\(^{18}\)

In 1929, the stand-pat intransigence of east Carolina growers broke with the crash. Commodity prices fell, banks failed, and credit evaporated. Tobacco that brought 25 cents in 1926, brought 12 in 1930.\(^{19}\) And these figures did not reflect an overall crisis in the tobacco industry. To the chagrin of farmers and, tobacco manufactures were still boasting record profits; and to the chagrin of agricultural planners, the impoverishment of tobacco country was not easily attributable to radical oversupply that plagued the equally destitute cotton producers.\(^{20}\) Facing their own ruin, leaders in eastern North Carolina joined forces with the smaller farmers and Extension agents that they had spent the previous decade opposing. The initiative for acreage reduction, which became the primary tool for managing the tobacco economy, came from eastern North Carolina. It succeeded because of the previous efforts at organization waged by Piedmont-based rural reformers like newspaper editor Clarence Poe and other Tri-State leaders. If economic initiatives can be thought of as geographically embodied, acreage reduction had a “New Belt” head, an “Old Belt” heart, and Washington’s hands.

Creditors like warehouse owners, merchants, and landlords, regarded as “individualistic to the core,” were motivated to halt the price spiral because it was affecting their own lines of credit. If farmers could stick with a program of supply

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\(^{20}\) Idem.
reduction, eastern Carolina could finance their “short” crop, and perhaps even force up the price of tobacco in the process. 21 “The more the farmer gets for his tobacco the more I get for selling it at the warehouse,” recalled one warehouse owner. 22 The Depression forced capital-holding men into accepting and even encouraging mass organization. But they wanted farmers organized on terms that did not threaten the basis of their own wealth, and preserved the auction system. This is precisely what the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) offered.

Two hundred miles north, social planners, agricultural economists, and leaders of farm organizations, argued over how to solve the long-term problems that faced the entire farm sector. Marketing solutions, which had been the favored tool of social scientists during 1920s, seemed by the early 1930s conservative, even anti-agrarian. A new cadre of planners now promoted crop control—incentivized supply reduction—as a competing strategy for addressing one underlying problem ailing agriculture: overproduction. Debates in Washington over these two approaches were heated, personal, and drawn in starkly contrasting terms. Down in North Carolina, farmers welcomed any reform that could get them money quickly. Ironically, straightforwardly agrarian spokesmen in North Carolina championed marketing reforms, which were considered a pro-business response to agricultural depression in Washington; production control, which was advocated by progressives in DC, found greatest favor with more conservative interests in North Carolina. Historical antipathies and ideological consistency were always secondary to cash.

21 Idem.
The demise of the Cooperative facilitated the rise of an eastern Carolina-based tobacco interest. Geographically compact and better organized than the demoralized farmers of the Piedmont, this agglomeration of landowners, merchants and warehousemen were poised and ready to take control of the New Deal tobacco program from its formation to implementation. Indeed, officials in Washington asked these “interested men” to order the chaotic tobacco terrain, highlighting the foundational nature of corporatist commodity organization to modern agriculture policy. Farmers were asked and licensed by the state to act as a non-competitive interest group so as to simplify the overwhelming proposition of governing the unruly countryside, and ameliorating the poverty of desperately poor farmers.23

Unsurprisingly, they did so in a way that benefitted themselves most. But the depression underscored the extent to which the fate of struggling tobacco farmers and their richer landlords, and moneylenders were intertwined. In less than ten years, tobacco went from anarchy to order. The men most opposed to Cooperative organization during flush economic times became the field marshals of agricultural organization when their own bank accounts were on the line. The New Deal consolidated the power of these eastern landlords, warehousemen and merchants. They ran the farmer-committees of the AAA; they became cozy with extension service agents and agriculture department officials—sometimes they were these officials. They formed an informal lobby—a nexus of influence in tobacco country and beyond. “Little tobacco” was less a grassroots than a

“topsoil” phenomenon. These men had connection to the crop; they “knew tobacco.” Like topsoil, though, this network concealed a weathered substratum. The policies forged and administered by elites reinforced these divisions, even as all prospered under the tobacco program.

III. Agricultural Adjustment in Theory and Practice

A chief architect of the New Deal farm policy was an out-of-work farm equipment dealer. When his Moline Plow Company went out of business, George Peek devoted his considerable energies to “fixing” the problems of the agricultural economy. Peek was a victim of the agricultural slump of the early 1920s, but his $100,000 salary as president of Moline Plow provided a golden parachute down into the depression. Perhaps because of his background in manufacturing, Peek fixated on the tariff as a problem and solution for farmers. Peek’s plan was later embodied in the failed McNary-Haugen legislation. It was an agribusiness solution, applying a successful business policy—the tariff—to agriculture.

To “make the tariff work for agriculture,” Peek’s plan emphasized parity, equalization, and stabilization—a holy trinity around which the farm program would develop. Peek and other agricultural leaders understood farming as disadvantaged relative to industry. A protective tariff did not protect surplus farm crops, but it did make manufactured inputs more expensive. Peek reasoned that if the government could make the tariff “effective for agriculture” farm products would achieve a “fair exchange value with industry.” Peek called this fair exchange value “parity,” a concept that became gospel to farmers late into the twentieth century. Parity was a static ratio. A commodity
was said to have achieved parity if it bore “the same ratio to [the] current general price index as a ten-year prewar average crop price bore to the average general price index for the same period.”  

Parity partisans shrewdly demanded that the ratio be tethered to American agriculture’s prewar “golden age.”

World prices drove down the price of surplus farm goods. In the 1922 *Equality for Agriculture*, the 48-page pamphlet that outlined what would become the McNary-Haugen legislation, Peek proposed a two-price system. Commodities in surplus of domestic demand were to be purchased at the *domestic price* by a government corporation, which would sell the surplus abroad at the *world price*. Farmers would finance the losses sustained by the surplus corporation through a tax, or “equalization fee,” assessed on each unit of commodity purchased by the corporation. The “equalization fee” was the seedling that sprouted into the “processing tax” of the New Deal. The government-operated surplus corporation found later incarnation as “stabilization” corporations that took excess commodities off the market for storage and later resale, thereby “stabilizing” prices by matching crop supply with demand.

Southern farmers were not initially buying what Peek was selling. Cotton and tobacco had large export markets. In the language of Peek’s opponents, an international “dumping” policy would offer them little benefit, but might prompt retaliatory tariffs that would hurt overall demand for southern cash crops. Southern politicians and farm leaders eventually supported the McNary-Haugen plan because Peek was persistent and pushy, and tobacco was added as a basic crop in order to court congressional votes and appeal of

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25 For an extended explanation on the politics of Peek’s plan and the personalities involved in the agricultural debates of the 1920s see Ibid and R. B. Heflebower, “Price Stabilization under the Farm Board,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 12, no. 4 (1930): 595-610.
the legislation. The failure of the southern commodity cooperatives and a subsequent price slump also made the case for comprehensive agriculture legislation. By 1927, the *Progressive Farmer* was editorializing in favor of the revised McNary-Haugen plan, which, in a sop to the Coolidge’s administration and southern farmers, encouraged cooperative marketing.26

Peek met opposition from farm economists who were interested in long term agricultural “adjustments.” Farm economists and even some of the measure’s supporters realized that raising farm prices would exacerbate a more basic problem: overproduction. Professional economists within the Bureau of Agricultural Economics supported McNary-Haugen as an emergency measure, but believed that structural adjustments were needed within farming.27 Reaffirming their own expertise, economists at the Division of Land Economics emphasized the necessity of a coordinated, thoughtful approach to agriculture as a whole, starting with the soil. Farm economists saw surplus production as a problem, in part, of land use: too much land in the United States was in cultivation. Long-range planning had to include acreage reduction, land retirement, and population shifts off the farm and into cities, where farm goods were consumed. Though not a direct result of professional planning, the ideas of the agricultural economists found their way into the New Deal as well. Human displacement, soil enrichment, and acreage reduction became planks in the New Deal farm policy as well. Like the processing tax and parity, what became New Deal land policy had long been on the minds of rural reformers.

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26 Perkins, *Crisis in Agriculture*, 24; See also: *Progressive Farmer*, 15 January 1927, 10.
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Milburn L. Wilson, professor of agricultural economics at Montana State College, did the most to develop and popularize “domestic allotment,” which was enshrined in the AAA as the voluntary acreage reduction program. Like Peek, Wilson put on his own promotional campaign, courting farm organizations, the farm press, extension agents, Congressman, economists, businessmen, and even Peek’s own brother, who was then president of the John Deere Company. Because he envisioned a more holistic approach to farm problems, Wilson’s ideas were popular at the USDA. By many accounts, Wilson was also more likeable than the irascible, stubborn Peek. For the emerging coterie of men interested in rural problems, Wilson was a better salesman selling a better product. Future Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, future Undersecretary of Agriculture Howard Tolley, and New Dealers Beardsley Ruml, Rexford Tugwell, and Mordecai Ezekiel, among others, supported the idea of acreage reduction before the New Deal. Peek bitterly opposed production control—or any plan that threatened to supplant his own in influence. When the farm reformers of the 1920s became the administrators of the 1930s the old animosities persisted, despite the fact that the AAA was a big tent of ideas.

While political elites may have been proprietary about their ideological turf, farm folk were less picky about the source of relief, especially as the Depression deepened and widened. Tobacco farmers in particular were used to multiple streams of advice. They were told to cooperate and organize; they were told that they deserved parity and equality for agriculture; they were told to diversify their crops, to farm on a “cash basis,” to put “food, feed, and fertility first.” These ideas flowed at crosscurrents: subsistence farming did not promote cooperation; parity disincentivized subsistence farming and acreage

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reduction; Acreage reduction made crop diversification more difficult. However, letters to the editor of the *Progressive Farmer* do not suggest that they viewed these strategies as contradictory. For those who could afford them, they were simply tools for living better.

Acreage reduction played an especially prominent role in tobacco politics due to the quaint-sounding “live-at-home” policy of Governor O. Max Gardner (1928-1932). Gardner was a businessman, a lawyer, and textile-mill owner. He was not an agrarian at heart or by background. His legacy of “business progressivism” lasted longer in North Carolina than he did. After leaving the governorship, Gardner never resided again in his home state, first working as a textile industry lobbyist in Washington, then as Roosevelt’s sometime advisor and speechwriter, before serving as undersecretary of the Treasury. He died in 1947 before he could fulfill his final appointment as ambassador to Great Britain.

Living at home was a slogan crafted in prosperity but suited to crisis. It was also a direct repetition of what extension agents and the farm press had been telling cash crop farmers for years: diversify. That is to say, it was not a politically risky or bold policy. Extension agents, farm leaders and economists had long encouraged southern farmers to reduce their dependence on cotton and tobacco in order to free themselves of time-merchant financing of the food that could be produced on-farm, and to promote an overall reduction in acreage. Agriculture officials hoped that by growing their own food

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29 V.O. Key’s classic *Southern Politics in State and Nation* called North Carolina a “progressive plutocracy.” Gardner, the businessman’s reformer, embodied this political mood. V. O Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), chapter ten.

30 Gardner’s sympathetic biographers—and even political historians—have overstated the ingenuity of “live-at-home” because they have neglected the ideas already well-established in agriculture during the Governor’s tenure. See, for instance, Joseph L Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner; a Power in North Carolina and New Deal Washington* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971).
instead of inedible cash crops, North Carolinians could keep the $250 million spent outside the state on food and feed. Second, by converting cotton and tobacco acreage to corn, potatoes and hay, the price of staples would rise.\(^{31}\) However, un-incentivized acreage reduction only appealed to a tiny number of small farm-owners who had enough money to convert their acreage to food. Neither tenants nor commercial farmers could afford to drop out of the market. “Your oft-repeated advice to the farmers to raise more livestock is good, sound common sense,” wrote one Wake County farmer to the Governor. “But will you tell me of any banker that will loan any money to a tenant farmer, or even one who has got his farm free and clear, to invest in livestock and buildings to house them?” he queried. “It costs money for even make-shift buildings to house hogs and cattle.”\(^{32}\) Without capital, landlord and tenant participation, live-at-home might fill stomachs, but it could not float prices.

Elites like Gardner and Bailey ignored the subsistence practices of many marginal farmers, particularly African Americans. In her excellent study of black smallholders in North Carolina, historian Adrienne Petty points out that despite a deficit of land, time and money, “small farmers devised their own, more practicable version of live-at-home farming,” that was, nevertheless, “not precisely what agricultural experts envisioned.”\(^{33}\) Many small farmers already grew corn, vegetables, and fruit crops; they traded with each other for what they did not have, and their children foraged for edible plants and berries. And, as oral historian LuAnn Jones has shown, home demonstration agents in particular


\(^{33}\) Petty, “Standing Their Ground,” 37.
were frequently willing to assist farm women with creative abundance in the midst of resource scarcity. Gardner’s Live-at-Home was presumptive in its assumption that farmers were not already trying to draw water (or canned vegetables or eggs) from stone whenever they could. But live-at-home was a platitude for the press, not the plow. To promote North Carolina-grown foods and feeds, the Governor hosted a live-at-home dinner at his Raleigh mansion. 250 guests—newspaper editors, businessmen, community leaders—ate a sumptuous locally-grown dinner of oyster, shrimp cocktail, country ham, wild turkey, local produce, and, of course, cigarettes. No doubt many farmers would have preferred to live in Gardner’s home.

More than a few of those present at the Governor’s fete were also leading the revival of cooperative marketing in the state, once again illustrating that the contradictions and rivalries apparent to farm ideologues in Washington were not difficult to resolve on the ground in tobacco country. As President, Herbert Hoover continued his far-reaching but ineffective commitment to associationalism. The Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929 established the Farm Loan Board, through which farmers could receive low-interest loans only through farmer-owned cooperatives. It was obvious to the Governor and to elites within the state that since farmers could not coordinate themselves, they would have to be corralled into cooperatives, even though this was not their preferred strategy, having failed once already.

In December 1929, growers, businessmen and rural leaders met in Raleigh to discuss restarting a cooperative association under the chairmanship of Extension Director

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I.O. Schaub. Once again, county agents launched an educational campaign, but few growers pledged their crop for the 1930 marketing season. Many growers had bad, bitter memories of the old Tri-State Coop. Others simply saw no advantage in joining a new, unproven association. The *Progressive Farmer* assured farmers that because the “United States government has come upon the scene as a special ally, defender, and promoter of cooperative marketing” the disaster of the Tri-State Coop’s receivership “will not happen again.”

Clarence Poe insisted that farmers had “no reason to fear a repetition of the mistakes of the old Tobacco Association or a receivership,” but they also had no reason to join the new organization. It took membership to make membership, and without a substantial amount of crop pledged, few growers joined the ill-fated Interstate Cooperative Growers Association.

It was a futile effort, but the campaign for the Interstate Cooperative changed the future of tobacco farming. After the crash of 1929, warehousemen, merchants, lawyers, and bankers in eastern North Carolina took up the farmers’ cause. In so doing, they made it their own. These men had been generally hostile to the old cooperative association, but the utter desperation of the tobacco situation illustrated that their own prosperity was dependent on tobacco farmers having an income. In a letter to Senator Josiah W. Bailey, R.W. Henninger, the Executive Secretary of Gardner’s Commission on Rural Relief, reported “things crumbling around us” in his survey of rural Carolina. “Many of our best and most prosperous farmers have come to me privately stating their inability to carry people [tenants] they have heretofore carried. The same sort of a story comes from many leading business people,” Henninger wrote.

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The problem was a lack of credit for financing crops and furnishing tenants. Banks closed in major tobacco market towns in the Eastern part of the state, and those that remained open were not loaning to farmers. An agricultural extension agent in the tobacco market town of Goldsboro beseeched his boss, state Extension Director Schaub, to “place the situation as it is given before the proper governmental officials” in the hope of securing additional credit assistance from the Federal Government. The depression was so deep and pervasive in rural North Carolina that the Unemployment and Relief Commissioner bitterly noted that the commission was “not fooling ourselves for a moment in believing that we are going to be able to eliminate suffering.” The best scenario that officials could hope for was to try to “hold it down to the point where we will not get demonstrations.”

As the depression enveloped them, eastern Carolina businessmen (elites only by comparison during the early 1930s) began to push farmers toward organization. When they did so, businessmen placed relatively less emphasis on cooperative marketing, and more emphasis on acreage reduction. Warehousemen in particular favored acreage reduction schemes because, unlike cooperative marketing, they posed no threat to the auction system, but at the same time promised to raise farm prices. Furthermore, acreage reduction shifted the burden of relief to the farmers’ themselves.

37 Badger, Prosperity Road, 22.
38 A.K. Robertson to I.O. Schaub, 2 April 1932, Folder- “RFC Correspondence, 1932,” Box 43, Gardner Papers, NCDAH.
39 R.W. Henninger to Josiah Bailey, 16 January 1932, Gardner Papers, Box 54, Folder- “RFC Correspondence, 1932,” Box 54, Gardner Papers, NCDAH.
The Eastern Carolina Chamber of Commerce, based in the marketing town of Kinston, organized a 3,000-person meeting in Raleigh in September of 1930. Attendees demanded that the governor establish a tobacco relief commission which would be responsible for enacting a 25% acreage reduction, and that he find out the particular grades of leaf in demand by the tobacco manufacturers. Growers also demanded that a new cooperative be established in order to receive funds from the Federal Farm Board. Six months later, the organizing committee of the Cooperative admitted that it had not signed up enough farmers to operate during the 1931 marketing season. Despite the fact that the only federal dollars available had to be funneled through a cooperative, dispirited farmers had given up on cooperation by May of 1931.40

Businessmen and warehousemen continued to press for acreage reduction, however. One year earlier, the same Kinston-based chamber of commerce that organized the September 1930 meeting urged Extension Director Schaub and Governor Gardner to emphasize withholding low-grade tobacco from the market. “Realizing the importance of this issue to the tobacco farmers, as well as to other business interests,” the businessmen suggested a plan to “regulate the supply of tobacco and keep it well within the increasing demands of consumption.”41 The businessmen told Schaub to launch a “campaign to discourage the selling of scrap and low grades of tobacco.” Schaub needed no cajoling to impress upon farmers the importance of acreage reduction. But more than that, the Extension Director was already sympathetic to and familiar with an unstated assumption of the businessmen’s plan: that elites should orchestrate and administer any effort to raise

40 Badger, Prosperity Road, 29.
farm income. In contrast with Poe’s rural romanticism, Schaub believed that there were
“more people striving for a living on farms than there should be…a drift from the farm to
other activities is needed.” Families that remained on the farm should invest in capital
improvements, “change their methods…and plans to use more horse power and more
machinery.” North Carolina’s Extension Director was already envisioning a
depopulated countryside of capital-intensive production. Those continued to farm would,
of financial necessity, already be the most prosperous. The Extension Service, moreover,
had deep relationships with prosperous landowners, whose property and cultivation
methods were held up as community models by demonstration agents. During the
depression, the Extension Service nudged together a nexus of growers and allied
agribusinessmen. These men were not interested in seeing broad “justice for the farmer”
or “equality for agriculture;” they did not want to change the way that farmers sold their
tobacco or received money for their crop. In the desperation of depression, farm
foreclosures, bank failures and even reports of starvation, they simply wanted more
income.

Live-at home suggested that the governor would be sympathetic to the acreage
reduction drive. He was, but Gardner also confessed to harboring qualms about the
constitutionality of compulsory reduction. He nevertheless assured Eastern elites that he
would continue to give supply control “the very best thought of which I am capable.” He also appointed prominent businessmen and growers to the Tobacco Relief
Commission (TRC) that they demanded at the Raleigh mass meeting.

42 Progressive Farmer, 18 January 1930, 12.
43 O.M. Gardner to F.W. Wooten, 24 September 1929. Folder-“Tobacco Situation 1929-1932,”
Gardner Papers. NCDAH.
The Commission was comprised of county representatives who were elected by growers, and seven “members-at-large” appointed by the Governor. The TRC had no power to legally enforce the program passed at the Raleigh meeting, but the election of these men legitimized policy initiation and administration by local elites. Indeed, many of those on the TRC were directly responsible for writing the New Deal’s tobacco policy. Some achieved even longer-lasting influence. Harold Cooley, for instance, later occupied the chair of the House Committee on Agriculture for longer than anybody else. At that time, he was just an ambitious lawyer from tiny Nashville, NC. J.E. Winslow, later president of the powerful North Carolina Farm Bureau, represented Pitt County, the largest tobacco-producing county in the state. Lionel Weil, a well-connected merchant from Goldsboro, was appointed to the Commission’s executive committee by Gardner. Both Weil and Winslow later assisted the AAA in formulating the tobacco contract.44

The Relief Commission had no special powers of compulsion, coercion or persuasion. It was unsuccessful in convincing farmers to reduce their acreage. By 1932 leaders sounded as anxious and dejected as the farmers. One Winston-Salem businessman wrote to Gardner with the vague hope that, “we may succeed in organizing the farmers for the 1932 crops,” but he had to admit that, “we are now in the worst plight I ever have known.”45 The Executive Secretary of the unemployment commission confirmed the perilous situation across the state. “Very many of our relief organizations are just managing to keep alive the people who applied to them, on a diet that is very inadequate

for maintaining health.\textsuperscript{46} Gardner ended his term as governor fearing the influence of “a doctrine so strange and radical that it had never been heard before by this generation in North Carolina.”\textsuperscript{47}

Gardner had no reason to fear. He failed at relieving the distress of tobacco farmers, but he succeeded in anointing a cadre of conservatively disposed landowners, warehousemen and merchants to steward the tobacco economy. The local leaders who participated in pre-New Deal efforts were well situated to lead the decentralized administration of New Deal farm policy. Farm agents, “representative landowners,” bankers, and warehouse owners tried to manage the crisis in absence of federal support. Their own livelihoods depended on it.\textsuperscript{48} Once the promise of such support arrived, these prominent men were ready to usher it in.

IV. “A program that we could make work:” Adjusting Tobacco Production\textsuperscript{49}

The bill that became the Agricultural Adjustment Act in May 1933 was roomy. It outlined relief plans to be put into place as Secretary of Agriculture Henry Agard Wallace saw fit. Embedded within the act were the fights of the previous decade. Peek’s parity concept and the farm planners’ notion of crop control were finally fused, as the government paid for the elimination of surplus for “basic” commodities in order to bring

\textsuperscript{46} R.W. Henninger to Josiah Bailey, 15 February 1932, Folder- “RFC Correspondence,” Box 54, Gardner Papers. NCDAH.

\textsuperscript{47} Quoted in Badger, Prosperity Road, 36.

\textsuperscript{48} Monica Gisolfi describes the same dynamic emerging among “merchants, bankers, and landowners” in cotton country who were “no longer immune to the poverty that surrounded them.” Monica Richmond Gisolfi, “From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South, 1929-1939,” Agricultural History 80, no. 2 (2006): 67-189.

farmers roughly the same purchasing power that existed between 1909 and 1914, agriculture’s so-called “Golden Age.”

Tobacco was already special, seeming to slide into the act under the radar. The justification for the designation of the six basic commodities—cotton, tobacco, rice, wheat, corn/hogs, and milk—was based on the assumption that they were in worse condition than other crops, that their surplus was unmanageable, and that they were foundational to the agricultural economy in that their prices threatened those of other commodities.\(^{50}\) Tobacco was, by far, less economically important, more geographically restricted, and nutritionally inessential. All farmers were suffering in 1932. While tobacco’s export stocks were piling up, they still accounted for a very small percentage of total US agricultural exports.\(^{51}\) But tobacco was important in Congress. Representatives from tobacco-producing states traded their votes for the crop’s inclusion in the failed McNary-Haugen legislation years earlier. It was an investment that paid dividends. Whereas other commodities used the 1909-1914 period to establish parity, such a historic statistic made no sense for tobacco as cigarette consumption was vastly greater in 1924 than it was in 1914. But flue-cured tobacco production was too puny from the perspective of other commodities to generate much of a fight against its special treatment. And even congressmen from North Carolina did not, at first, seem much interested in tobacco’s inclusion in the 1933 Act, suggesting that the tobacco program’s ultimate success—and longevity—was not predictable.\(^{52}\)


\(^{52}\) Badger, *Prosperity Road*, 40-41.
Rewritten throughout the decade to meet the emergencies of the times, the demands of growers, and the constitutional scruples of the courts, the basic gist of the tobacco program nonetheless remained the same. Farmers were paid to take land out of production. To prevent new farmers from growing tobacco, an allotment system was established. This froze production around a “historic base”—what a grower cultivated on January 1, 1933. Growers who produced in excess of their allotted quota faced heavy penalties. In order for the tobacco program to take effect, 2/3 of quota-holders had to vote for its implementation by referendum.

After the act was passed, its immediate consequences for tobacco were unclear, and the lassitude with which the AAA moved on tobacco further underscored how inapt the crop’s “basic” designation was. AAA officials in Washington were more preoccupied with working out a plan for the disastrous cotton and wheat harvests than with helping the flue-cured grower. In late 1933, Wallace finally named John B. Hutson to head the tobacco section. More than any one person, Hutson defined the New Deal in tobacco, laying the foundation for subsequent program policy. Like the commodity he represented, Hutson had a knack for staying under the official radar. The Kentuckian moved noiselessly through the agricultural bureaucracy, barely making an appearance in the historical literature on the role of planners in the New Deal or the agricultural politics of the period. But Hutson was an able administrator, who got along equally well with liberal Alger Hiss and arch-conservative Senator Jimmy Byrnes. At an international sugar conference in London he even managed to become friendly with then-Prime Minister

53 Though both discuss the network of agricultural policy planners who created and implemented farm legislation, neither Kirkendall nor Saloutos give more than passing mention to Hutson. Agricultural sociologist Jess Gilbert, who has written extensively on the geography and character of “urban liberal” and “Midwestern agrarian” policy circles, has also not devoted much discussion to Hutson’s role in the AAA.
Framed MacDonald. From his early career in farm management and extension to his ascent through the USDA and New Deal bureaucracy, and later as president of a tobacco export promotion association, Hutson promoted and embodied the kind of sectoral hybridity that defies the state-society distinction. Not an organization man—though he organized thousands—but organizational man, Hutson exemplified what historian Louis Galambos has described as “diffused power and tangled lines of authority.”  

Hutson worked at the Bureau of Agricultural Economics during the mid-1920s just as that department was developing the ideas that became New Deal farm policy. In his oral history Hutson was emphatic that the agricultural debates of the 1920s occurred “on a little bit higher level than the one on which I worked.” Still, Hutson was plugged in to a network that conditioned how he envisioned farming, and, later, how farmers saw their own enterprises. Hutson held his boss at the BAE, Howard Tolley, in special regard, insisting that his old mentor had originated the idea of acreage adjustment. Hutson considered M.L. Wilson, adjustment’s putative author, to be merely the salesman of the plan. Tolley was a mathematician by training, exemplifying what sociologist Jesse Gilbert has called the “agrarian intellectual” mold, favoring, “a developmentalist state, national economic planning, and the self-organization of labor as well as agriculture.”  

From Tolley, Hutson absorbed a faith in planning and a reverence for administration. But Hutson’s time at the BAE was cut short by a post to Europe with the Foreign Agriculture Service. What was supposed to have been a one-year post appraising the “immediate market prospects” for American leaf in Europe, turned into a three-year

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immersion in the European tobacco industry. Hutson was a government-sponsored agent of private market expansion, witnessing—and maybe even facilitating—the European market shift from “Oriental [Turkish] types of cigarettes to US cigarettes.” Importantly, he made connections with “tobacco people” in the foreign departments of agriculture and manufacturing. By the time he was appointed administrator of the tobacco section of the AAA in 1933, Hutson had first-hand experience with the two guiding principles of the flue-cured program: acreage reduction and market expansion.

On the ground in North Carolina, Governor John Christoph Blucher Ehringhaus did not have time to think principles. AAA officials made it clear that the program would only operate in the tobacco belt if the initiative came from the fields. For reasons both pragmatic and philosophical, Washington-based officials like Hutson had to be certain that tobacco growers wanted and would run the program. The AAA didn’t have the manpower or political capital to wage a big, self-promoting propaganda campaign, and planners were committed to the idea of farmer-democracy.

In early 1933, before any farm legislation was passed, but when it was clear that some version of an acreage reduction measure would be the Roosevelt administration’s primary policy response to the agricultural depression, M.L. Wilson published an article in the Progressive Farmer explaining the program. The pitch had something to satisfy various groups in tobacco country. Farmers would be content with the fact that “it’s voluntary;” in contrast to the McNary-Haugen plan, the production-control elements obviated the need for foreign “dumping,” forestalling any retaliatory measures by foreign governments; consumers would be happy because “the plan would not operate to raise

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56 Reminiscences of John B. Hutson, 102, COHC.
prices above the 1910-1914 purchasing power level.” The most attractive aspect of acreage reduction to would-be tobacco leaders was that it “would not disturb present sales and distribution methods.” Farmers would have an active role in the program’s implementation as “management would rest largely with state and local committees, which means that administration would be decentralized.” This was the wedge that allowed warehousemen, merchants, and prosperous growers to dominate the tobacco program. Wilson further specified this loose web of the national, state and local that would bind the entire program together. “A national administrative board would determine from price relationships whether a vote by producers of a given commodity should be called.” With this information at hand, “state allotment committees of farm and business leaders would be necessary to divide each state’s allotment among countries.” At the still smaller level, “county and…community committees would finally apportion the allotments among individual growers with acreages and yields over a designated period as allotments.” Farmers would be free not to participate, but they would be ineligible for the benefit funds derived from the processing tax on manufacturers.  

For the men serving on local committees, this extreme decentralization was the embodiment of agrarian democracy. But for growers with less political clout (and for historians of farm policy), these committees were the site of elite domination. In the early months of the New Deal, the local program was simply a matter of emergency and expediency. As Hutson told farmers in the summer of 1933: “Don’t expect us to sit in

57 Progressive Farmer, February 1933, 24.
Washington, devise a plan and say here it is.” This was a chance for local leaders to foment and whip up farmer sentiment for a program that they would also control. These elites came through, providing AAA officials with huge audiences at mass meetings throughout the tobacco belt. At one such meeting in July 1933, Hutson announced that there would be no immediate “plow up” campaign for tobacco since other commodities demanded his agency’s immediate attention. An acreage reduction campaign would be undertaken for the 1934 crop, but any increase in prices in 1933 would have to come from marketing agreements negotiated between the AAA and manufacturers. Hutson and AAA chief Chester Davis left the door open, however, for growers to rally around the agency and make their own demands. Davis told the audience that, “we think we are going to go further safely if we do not go too far in front of the army and get shot from behind.” The AAA wanted farmer-foot soldiers to lead the reduction drive—this would, at the very least, ensure that farmers wanted to reduce their acreage. As political scientist Victor Magagna has noted, corporatist political economy works toward such economic equilibrium, particularly at times of potential social unrest. For farmers and AAA officials, “destabilizing behavior [was] foregone in favor of the larger objectives of economic stability, political order, and mutually advantageous bargains.” The state encouraged farmer mobilization not out of strength or “capacity”, but because organized farmers offered predictability. And for farmers, the state support offered the very same thing.

59 Badger, Prosperity Road, 47.
60 Idem.
North Carolina Extension Director Ira Schaub volunteered his country agents as field officers—conduits between growers and the AAA. This tied the pre-existing circuit of elites to the AAA’s policymaking process. Schaub hitched himself immediately to AAA, not because he ardently believed in the agency’s mission—it wasn’t precisely clear what it was anyway—but because he saw it as a way to ensure the continuation and expansion of his own bureaucracy. Even before the AAA was signed as law, Schaub had “been in contact with Ehringhaus about the need to protect the extension service should [rumors of] large-scale federal reorganization take place.”

Three days later, the governor wired President Roosevelt, warning that “any proposal to eliminate aid to state experimental stations, land grant colleges, extension services and vocational agriculture” would “irreparably injure work looking toward agricultural rehabilitation.” Schaub did not waste this rare combination of crisis, attention and support. He instructed county agents to select farmers as delegates to a meeting scheduled for September in Raleigh. In the meantime, farmers became even more demoralized as early-opening markets opened with distressingly low prices. Through their county agents and at meetings all across the eastern belt, growers intensified their protests. In August 1933, just before Eastern Carolina markets were set to open, influential growers, the extension service and the farm press coordinated the largest and most effective protest meeting to date in Raleigh.

The two thousand assembled growers were angry that the New Deal had not yet been made to work for them; bitter at the fact that NRA codes had caused other costs to rise, and fuming over the fact that parity had not been promised for the 1933 crop. Protest

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62 I.O. Schaub to J.C.B. Ehringhaus, 8 April, 1933, Folder- “NCSC, Extension Division,” Box 12, Papers of Governor J.C.B. Ehringhaus (hereafter Ehringhaus Papers), NCDAH.
63 I.O. Schaub to J.C.B. Ehringhaus, *Ehringhaus Papers*, 11 April 1933, Folder- “NCSC, Extension Division,” Box 12, Ehringhaus Papers, NCDAH.
came easily to tobacco farmers. What made this meeting different was the response that was ignited by the growers’ ire. Select farmers went to Washington to work out a plan for the entire sector. Private local action pressed upon public officials. These farmers were prodded by the extension service to congregate, rally and make demands.

Historians who have described the Extension Service as an institutional lackey of both the AAA and of elite farmers capture only part of the story. Schaub and other extension officials viewed the empowerment of their own bureaucracy as possible by pressuring its institutional superior. This dynamic echoed the kind of initiative taken by the extension service at organizing the Tri-State Tobacco Growers Cooperative in the 1920s even in defiance of the USDA’s guidelines. Political Scientist Daniel Carpenter might call this bureaucratic autonomy. Such a term inadequately captures the webby nature of local power. Extension officials, elite farmers and merchants were, in this instance, all working toward the same goal: organized coordination of the tobacco economy. A class of growers that had long been aided by and aided extension officials once again worked seamlessly toward organizing the mass of growers to ensure swift, profitable action by the federal government.

V. J.C.B. Ehringhaus: An Unlikely Agrarian

Whether administrative demagoguery, brilliant political chessmanship, or simply a pragmatic way to make the farm program work, the AAA’s mobilization of farmer sentiment illustrated the popular risk politicians ran if they opposed the administration’s

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agriculture policy. Those auditoriums brimming with angry farmers were illustrated the support available to a politician who would champion their cause. Governor Ehringhaus seized the opportunity to capture populist momentum. A lawyer from Elizabeth City, located near the Albemarle Sound, Ehringhaus was an unlikely agrarian. Though he sent a letter urging production control to Gardner during his predecessor’s tenure, he did so as a friend to the warehousemen. Hand-picked by Gardner and narrowly defeating a populist insurgent in the primary, Ehringhaus’ first few months in office were spent defending his austere tax policy, which ran contrary to the recommendations of the State Tax Commission, but which made tobacco and insurance firms happy.

Since early August 1933, Ehringhaus had been prodded by his wealthy friends in the eastern part of the state to take bold action in pursuit of whatever the New Deal had to give. In a letter to the Governor, merchant and landowner Lionel Weil drew attention to the “various price supporting movements that have recently been undertaken by the government.” Surely, “no other commodity merits our immediate attention more than the proper price of tobacco this fall.” Weil suggested coordinating some “interested people” for a visit with “Secretary Wallace and Mr. Davis” to secure “urgent and immediate action.” In the meantime, these “interested people” corralled farmers to attend the Raleigh meeting a few weeks later where they passed resolutions dictating the governor and the AAA to swift and specific action. They wanted the AAA to ensure parity for the

65 Badger, Prosperity Road, 52-55.
67 Key, Southern Politics, 213; Paul Luebke, Tar Heel Politics: Myths and Realities (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 211-212.
68 Lionel Weil to J.C.B. Ehringhaus, 3 August 1933, Folder- “Correspondence 9/1933,” Box 107. Ehringhaus Papers, NCDAH.
1933 crop, and they wanted an immediate start to the acreage reduction signup campaign for 1934.

Farmers wanted bolder action from the governor. They demanded that he “close every tobacco warehouse in North Carolina, under his exercise of martial law, and that he keep them closed until the Federal Government has put into effect measures that will raise the prices of tobacco.” Before a group of growers even delivered the message to the vacationing Ehringhaus, he declared an unprecedented voluntary marketing holiday. This was a gambit to buy time for the federal government to negotiate a program satisfying to growers and acceptable to manufacturers. On September 1, the day major North Carolina markets were set to open, no auctioneers chanted. While growers, warehousemen, and local businessmen anxiously awaited news from Washington, they also flooded the governor’s office with effusive letters of praise and gratitude. Once considered an anointed instrument of “the interests,” Ehringhaus was now the most popular man in North Carolina.

The delegation of North Carolinians set to confer with the AAA on the flue-cured program was originally only to include elite growers and warehousemen, but once North Carolina’s senators and congressmen saw how popular Ehringhaus had become, they attended these sessions as well. Amidst a popular groundswell filtered through articulate local leaders clamoring for federal action and money, the “tobacco congressman” was born. On September 4 and 5, the tobacconen conferred in Washington. They worked with the AAA to find a solution that would allow the markets to reopen as quickly as possible while still satisfying growers desperate for prices to increase. Two men from

69 “Resolution,” 31 August 1933, Folder- “Correspondence 9/1933,” Box 107, Ehringhaus Papers, NCDAH.
Greenville, tobacco section assistant J. Con Lanier and Congressman Lindsey Warren, devised the plan for the fall. Growers would sign a tentative contract whose details would be worked out later in further consultation with growers and AAA planners. This would allow the sign-up campaign to begin immediately and the markets to re-open.70

A lawyer and the former mayor of his major marketing town, Lanier could not have been more different from his AAA boss. Hutson avoided conflict, sought compromise, and was more of a desk-bound pencil-pusher than a headcracking grandstander. Loathe to dwell on the ideological differences that emerged between his colleagues, and diplomatic to the point of obliviousness, Hutson was, above all things, temperate. Lanier, by contrast, was rough and rude. He relished a good fight and sharp insult. Those who disagreed with him in the AAA were “sons of bitches;” the leader of the failed Tri-State Coop was a “Dago from California;” the American Cancer Society was “the biggest racket in America.”71 Lanier knew his own influence, both in North Carolina among growers and businessmen, and among his friends in Washington, including Congressman Lindsay Warren, John Kerr, and future Agriculture Committee Chair Harold Cooley. Lanier’s lack of tact may have prevented him from achieving higher political office, but it made him wickedly tough in meetings, in front of subcommittees, or on trade missions.

After this tentative solution was worked out in Washington, leaders were on the clock to sign up farmers back in North Carolina. Extension Director Schaub handpicked growers to assist the extension service with the campaign. Claude Hall, a member of the

70 Badger, Prosperity Road, 53.
71 J. Con Lanier Oral History Interview, 19 March 1973, Special Collections Department, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina (ECU).
Washington delegation, was named the president of the North Carolina Tobacco Growers Association. The assistant director of the Extension Service served as secretary. This public-private fusion was characteristic of tobacco section’s administration. This was not a representative farmer democracy; the advisory committee was selected based on influence, not common-man appeal. It was also not an illustration of state strength. The overworked Extension Service needed help in carrying out the signup. Pragmatic elitism ran the New Deal in North Carolina. Everybody wanted higher prices for tobacco; rich men—whether owners of warehouses, merchants, or landlords—were the most coordinated, organized and easiest to enlist.

Unlike the cotton plowup campaign where individuals were sought out individually to sign contracts, tobacco farmers went to designated centers to pledge their commitment to crop reduction. The location of these centers underscored the spatial dimension of the new tobacco politics. Merchants and warehousemen volunteered their businesses and staff to assist the signup drive. Growers in the East, where many such businesses existed, signed up with remarkable speed. Over 500 farmers signed the contract during first hour in Greenville, for instance. Farmers in the Piedmont were slower to sign. Their ambivalence over the administration of the tobacco program persisted throughout the decade. Nonetheless, the assurance of federal aid—“the full power and prestige of the government”—was overwhelmingly persuasive. Ninety five percent of all growers signed the contract in under two weeks.

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72 In an uncanny coincidence, a Hollywood actor with the same name was the third to portray Marlboro Man.
73 Keel and Long to J.C.B. Ehringhaus, 6 September 1933, Folder-“Corresp. 9/1933,” Box 107, Ehringhaus Papers. NCDAH.
VI. Selling to the Buyers

The precise details of the domestic allotment plan had not been fully worked out when farmers signed marketing contracts. Their promise to reduce production was premised on the government’s promise to give them a guaranteed price on all the tobacco they legally produced under the quota system. The AAA rushed growers to a half-formed contract because it needed farmer participation as leverage to face a much more formidable negotiating partner: the tobacco manufacturers. The tobacco companies wanted to talk details, and were in a better position to extract them. Manufacturers were less concerned with the requirement that they agree to pay an average of 17 cents per pound for flue-cured leaf at auction than they were about the prospect of greater scrutiny of their internal operations—a fear that in the era of the online industry archive appears quite prescient. In particular, manufacturers did not want the government to access their records of advertising expenditures.\(^\text{74}\) The AAA’s consumer council and legal division troubled executives like R.J. Reynolds’ S. Clay Williams, who acted as the buyers’ representative in negotiations with the government. As Williams blustered in one bargaining session, much more was at stake in the AAA than the price floor. The very right of companies to “stay under management free from government control” was on the line. Were companies simply “to go into a position where nobody in the management of a company can take any action that amounts to anything…without coming to the government and asking for permission?”\(^\text{75}\) At the same session, Williams readily conceded that the minimum price-requirement and even the processing tax had “some potentiality…for working out the solution of the thing that none of us, through the years,


\(^{75}\) Quoted in Knapp and Parramore, “Flue-Cured Developments,” 336.
have been able to work out on our own,” namely, that “the tobacco grower may have a fair price for his product and a fair return on his labor.” The monopolistic structure of the tobacco industry explained Williams’ apathy toward price fixing: it did not matter if a buy had to pay more for leaf so long as all buyers had to pay more. The processing tax did thus not disrupt the oligopolistic structure of the industry. Indeed, it consolidated the industry position vis-à-vis the government and farmers. Corporatism for farmers meant the consolidation of manufacturers interests as well.

Getting to a final marketing agreement with the tobacco companies was excruciating. Hutson described the conferences with tobacco executives as “8-10 hours a day with the same group of people, on problems that would last for a week.” In North Carolina, with the markets still closed and tobacco farmers still unpaid, Ehringhaus was getting antsy. He wired Chester Davis, George Peek and the president separately, urging them toward speedy resolution with the manufacturers. The governor seemed genuinely surprised that Roosevelt did not respond to his frantic telegrams, telling the president that, “if you could know the distress in our tobacco belt and the urgency of immediate and remedial action I feel surely you would see that it is forthcoming.” Roosevelt responded more than a week later, essentially telling Ehringhaus to calm down while “conflicting interests” were being “harmonized.” At once reminiscent of the businessman’s democracy under the War Industries Board and the language of European

76 Idem.
77 Reminiscences of John B. Hutson, 134, COHC.
78 J.C.B. Ehringhaus to Franklin Roosevelt, 6 October 1933, Folder-“Corresp. 10/1933,” Box 107, Ehringhaus Papers, NCDAH.
79 Franklin Roosevelt to J.C.B. Ehringhaus, 14 October 1933, Folder-“Corresp. 10/1933,” Box 107, Ehringhaus Papers, NCDAH.
consensual corporatism, the early planning of the tobacco program relied on a vision of state-induced sectoral synchronization.

Growers, buyers and the government reached a fragile tenuous harmony on October 12, 1933. After the AAA threatened the intransigent companies with a licensing requirement, buyers agreed to purchase as much tobacco between September 1933 and April 1934 as they had used the past year. They also agreed to pay 17c/lb for it. Prices of tobacco products were not to exceed what prevailed on January 3, 1933. In return for these concessions, the government agreed not to interfere with the management of the companies, dropping the license provision. Through these negotiations the tobacco companies learned a useful lesson: by making select concessions to growers, they could successfully ward off further government regulation by pointing toward their cooperation, goodwill and largess.

The motives of the companies did not matter to farmers in the fall of 1933. As soon as the agreement was set in ink, prices soared. For 1933, growers received an average of 15.3c/lb, compared with 11.6c/lb in 1932. Tobacco farmers received a total of $85.6 million in 1933, more two and a half times their cash total in 1932. This windfall reverberated through the local economy. At Christmas time, used car lots were sold out—something that had not happened in more than a decade. Bank deposits doubled and taxes were paid more quickly.\textsuperscript{80} The lead headline of the December, 1933 \textit{Progressive Farmer} put it succinctly: “Tobacco farmers are happy.”\textsuperscript{81}

While farmers were feeling flush, officials in the AAA, Extension Service, and the Tobacco Growers Association worked on the details of the permanent contract—one

\textsuperscript{80} Badger, \textit{Prosperity Road}, 65.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Progressive Farmer}, December 1933, 18.
that served as the skeleton of the tobacco program for the next fifty years. Participating farmers were to reduce their “base acreage”—the average of how much tobacco acres they cultivated between 1931 and 1933—by 30%. In exchange, they would receive a rental payment of $17.50 for each acre removed from production, and a benefit payment of 12% of the selling price of his tobacco at auction. In response to demands from the Tobacco Growers Association, Congressman John Kerr sponsored a bill imposing a tax on non-signers.82

Growers supported the New Deal tobacco program with a vengeance and with some venom. Secretary Wallace opposed compulsion, reasoning that it was “an undemocratic approach to force a man to reduce whether he wanted to or not.”83 The “disloyalty” that undermined the old Tri State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative likely played a role in fuelling farmers’ demands for compulsory crop control. The tobacco topsoil pushed up to Congressmen and down to the grassroots, creating “near unanimous sentiment” among growers for legislative punishment for non-signers. At meetings across the tobacco belt, growers wired their representatives, in the words of one Congressman, “besieging” them with demands for control.84 Wallace, insistent that the domestic allotment plan be voluntary, inserted a referendum provision in the legislation. When the Kerr-Smith Tobacco Marketing Control Act passed in June 1934, it stipulated that 2/3 of growers had to approve by vote a tax on the sale of unpledged tobacco.

The 1935 Annual Report of the State Extension Service explained that, “the farmers had become firmly convinced that rigid control of production was the only way

82 Kerr had some political capital to regain in his Old Belt district after missing the vote on the original 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act.
83 Badger, Prosperity Road, 78.
84 Ibid, 75-76.
to guarantee a fair price for their leaf.”

Prominent, semi-official men firmly convinced them. Though few growers refused tobacco contracts—certainly not enough to undermine the success of the tobacco program—participating growers still grumbled. Paradoxically, in what was “undoubtedly the most popular of the AAA” programs,” compulsory control never went far enough at removing a phantom threat to satisfy some growers. As the Extension Service report put it, the growers “wanted a program with teeth in it, a program that would make it impossible for the non-signer to sell a pound of tobacco.”

Reinforced by yearly referenda, the phantom menace of disloyalty fostered defensiveness around the program. For farmers who had lived at the edge of starvation, agrarian democracy meant active defense. And through the practice of defense, farmers came to feel a consolidated interest and an economic identity in the tobacco program.

**VII. United States v. Butler**

In 1936 that identity was under siege. In January of that year, the Supreme Court invalidated the “first triple-A” in the landmark case of *United States v. Butler*. The tobacco belt had arisen out of the collapse of cotton prices a quarter-century earlier. But now, processors of king cotton, chafing under the tax imposed by the AAA, had the potential to undo the basis of tobacco prosperity. In the decision The Court held that the processing tax was an unconstitutional transfer of wealth from one sector to another, invading “the reserved powers of the States.” Furthermore, the Agricultural Adjustment Act was coercive—

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86 Ibid., 5.
“at best” a “scheme for purchasing with federal funds submission to federal regulation of a subject reserved for the States.” Did the Supreme Court, as with the *Schecter Poultry* decision, torpedo American corporatism? After all, the *Butler* decision broke the seesaw of commodity chain harmony in severing the tax on processors from the benefit payments to farmers. And it was precisely the action of this seesaw—the traceable movement of cash from one part of the economy to another, what agricultural planner M.L. Wilson might have understood as two arms finding balance by shifting weight between them—that rendered the Agricultural Adjustment Act unconstitutional. While Congress was certainly within its rights to tax and redistribute for the benefit of the general welfare, the Court could not consider the processing tax a tax in the strict sense. As Justice Owen Roberts wrote on behalf of the majority: “the word has never been thought to connote the expropriation of money from one group for the benefit of another.” This would seem to disrupt the corporatist logic of coordinated organization and sector-based bargaining.

And the tobacco belt’s desperate response to the decision would seem to confirm that something profoundly disruptive to their livelihood had transpired. “Back to Despair” read the headline of the Raleigh *News and Observer*’s editorial. One farm meeting described the decision as a “death blow to our hopes;” others mobilized by contacting the Governor and members of North Carolina’s Congressional delegation. They demanded “the proper authorities…take immediate action in the adoption of some substitute plan to replace the AAA.” Elected officials were doing just that since their

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88 Idem.
89 Badger, *Prosperity Road*, 122-123.
90 “Resolutions of the Farmers and Business Men’s Club of Franklinton,” 28 January 1936, Folder:“AAA,” Box 140, Ehringhaus Papers, NCDAH.
own political prospects and, frequently, personal wealth was tied in to the health of the tobacco economy. Everybody was hooked on the tobacco program.

But the legislation that replaced the first Agricultural Adjustment Act was to demand an equal measure of incorporation by farmers. The Supreme Court’s reservations about the coercive elements of the first Triple-A fell by the wayside thanks to the patina of democracy afforded by the periodic referenda. Harold Cooley had been elected to Congress since serving on the emergency Tobacco Relief Commission in the late 1920s. On the floor of the House in February 1936, Cooley demanded substitute legislation for the invalidated Kerr-Smith Act. “The Supreme Court voted against the Triple A by a vote of 6 to 3,” Cooley lamented. “The farmers voted for the Triple A by a vote of 19 to 1, yet the Triple A is no more.”

Though he was skeptical of the replacement act’s ability to adequately protect “the tobacco farmer…the true forgotten man of America,” Cooley nonetheless urged his colleagues toward “justice to those who are helpless…to the end that we may at least hope for a successful tobacco program.”

The ersatz Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (SCDAA) was enough to sustain that hope until 1938, when a permanent farm act passed. Under the guise of land-stewardship, the SCDAA raised incomes by paying farmers to reduce their soil-depleting crops (cash crops), and paid them to diversify to soil-enriching crops. Hutson worked closely with Alger Hiss in drafting the legislation as it pertained to tobacco. He described it as “essentially what we had been doing under the triple A act.” Land-use planners in Washington were hopeful that incentivizing soil conservation would improve

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91 Congressional Record, 74th Congress, Second Session (1936), p. 2570.
92 Ibid.
93 Reminiscences of John B. Hutson, 201, COHC.
farming practices. But the Extension Service, the institution charged with disseminating improved farming techniques, viewed its duties regarding the SCDA through the price paradigm. The 1937 North Carolina Extension Service Annual Report described “improving the net income of the farm family” as “one of its chief problems.” The Soil Conservation Act demonstrated how synonymous tobacco and price policy had become. Formerly subject to price extremes at auction, tobacco farmers were unwilling to relinquish the benefits of predictability.

Farmers lobbied hard for rigid crop control in the 1938 Farm Act. When it was passed, it enabled the Secretary of Agriculture to proclaim a quota on tobacco produced for a given year. If a grower produced in excess of his allotted quota, a 50% tax was to be levied on his surplus. This degree of regimentation was remarkable even in the context of the more rigid early farm policy. The House Agricultural Committee accepted compulsory control on tobacco but not on other crops because, as Lindsey Warren put it, “there is more sentiment in our state for crop control than in any other state in the union.”

At least farmers who counted the most were for compulsion. At a 1937 agricultural subcommittee hearing on the proposed legislation, Claude Hall demanded, on behalf of the Tobacco Advisory Committee, that the government “give us compulsory control—one that has teeth in it.” He reported attending meetings in the Eastern part of the state where thousands of farmers “voted unanimously for a control program for

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95 Badger, Prosperity Road, 147.
tobacco.”96 Other briefs and resolutions filed with the subcommittee by farmers and local organizations underscored this sense of unanimity.97 Senator Ellison “Cotton Ed” Smith of South Carolina, who chaired the committee, evidently agreed. “I think a bill with all essential features that would compel any man to observe it can be worked out…and still be constitutional.”98 The record indicates that his statement was met with applause in the (R.J.) Reynolds Auditorium.

**Conclusion: Who Controlled the Crop?**

The AAA deliberately sought out influential growers to administer and sell the plan to their less wealthy neighbors. They also relied on these growers to report grassroots sentiment back to the Extension Service. At every level of farm policy—from drafting the initial reduction contracts, to signing up farmers, to enforcing acreage reduction—the AAA was an organizational satyr. “You would select an outstanding man from a community” to serve the AAA in an advisory capacity, Hutson recalled. “He might be an employee or a college of agriculture. He might be just a farmer. He might even be a farmer-lawyer.” Whether or not the man was in a “public” position at a college or in the extension service, or in “private” life as a farmer was not the salient point for policymakers. What mattered, simply, was that “he was a man that people respected in the area.”99 Local influence tied the tobacco web. It was a positive feedback loop as

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97 Ibid., 100-103.
98 Ibid., 99.
99 Reminiscences of John B. Hutson, 134, COHC.
handpicked local leaders’ influence rose in tandem with the popularity of the tobacco program and with local communities’ dependence upon it.

The historiographical preoccupation with parsing the extent to which New Deal policy was a result of top-down capacity or bottom-up capture appears even more beside the point when examining the contract signup campaign. Officials in Washington wanted a growers’ organization to exist, but farmers had repeatedly failed to organize themselves. In light of the necessity for haste in the fall of 1933, farmers did not have the luxury of marshalling yet another attempt at organization through farm press propaganda and mass-rallies. The group of men that eventually became the Tobacco Growers’ Advisory Committee was nominated by the North Carolina Extension Director to speak as the voice of tobacco farmers—whether at AAA meetings or Congressional subcommittee hearings. The Extension Service’s entanglement with the TGAC was just a more successful version of what the agricultural bureaucracy had tried to do with the Tri-State Tobacco Growers Cooperative: equip farmers to get all they could from government, and to use these organizations to make sure that government policy could proceed smoothly on the ground. The Growers’ Advisory Committee was undoubtedly and deliberately a pressure group; its raison d’etre was to be proof of farmer desire for the tobacco program. The Growers’ Advisory Committee fulfills, almost to a T, scholarly definitions of corporatism. Tobacco farmers were licensed to grow; they were not competitive with each other in the sense that their product was guaranteed to receive a minimum price at auction; through the Growers Advisory Committee was a
“representational monopoly” to policymakers and the Secretary of Agriculture.\textsuperscript{100} An analytical vocabulary that would characterize this political economy as state-centered or driven by special interests risks, on the one hand, overstating the power of the government, particularly during a time of crisis; and on the other fails to appreciate how very deeply farmer administration and ratification was built into state policy.

PART II:

EXPANSION
Chapter 3:
How the New Deal Created the Tobacco Lobby

*United States v. Butler* was hardly the most prominent challenge to the political economy of the early New Deal. In 1935 and 1936, the Supreme Court handed down a series of decisions that challenged the corporatist mode of governance. *Carter v. Carter Coal Company* (1936) and, crucially, *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States* (1935) negated the right of Congress to delegate law making to industrial groups.¹ *Schechter* deemed the National Industrial Recovery Act “utterly inconsistent with the constitutional prerogatives and duties of Congress” because it allowed “trade or industrial associations” to draft codes of fair competition, and thus “empower[ed] them to enact laws for the rehabilitation and expansion of their trades and industries.” In his majority opinion, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes allowed himself a bit of incredulity:² “But would it be seriously contended that Congress could delegate its legislative authority to trade or industrial associations or groups so as to empower them to enact the laws they deem to be wise and beneficent for the rehabilitation and expansion of their trade or industries?”³

Historians have understood Hughes’ words, and the broader stance represented by the *Schechter, Butler, and Carter Coal* decisions, as the Court’s jealous reaffirmation of its prerogatives vis-à-vis Congress and the president.⁴ In invalidating the cartelizing


2 *Schechter* was a unanimous decision, but Justice Benjamin Cardozo, writing on behalf of Justice Harlan Stone, authored a concurrence. *Schechter Poultry Corp., v. United States*, 295 U.S. 495 (1935).

3 Idem.

4 Historian William Leuchtenburg has articulated this position most forcefully. He has argued that the Court abruptly reversed its position of “conservative judicial activism” in response to
initiatives of the “first” New Deal, the Court expressed deference to the boundary between public power and private initiatives. It argued that NIRA and the Bituminous Coal Act improperly blurred these domains by allowing trade associations a seat at the code-making table—in effect formalizing the dominance of those firms able to participate in the regulatory process. These judicial decisions were intended to maintain the distinction between public and private interests by limiting the authority of Congress to delegate its powers of governance.

Writing in response to the *Carter Coal* decision, the legal scholar Louis Jaffe, who would go on to become one of the foremost authorities on American administrative law, challenged the Court’s fussy, old-fashioned interpretation of Congressional delegation of power. In the *Harvard Law Review*, Jaffe contended, by contrast, that “it has long been accepted that where regulation is necessary the legislation cannot by statute alone provide a system sufficiently complete.” Surveying a spectrum of social and economic legislation from fields as varying as humane societies to medical licensing boards, Jaffe argued that courts must restrain themselves from striking down legislation that makes room for group participation in law making and government. Turning toward a common corporatist metaphor, Jaffe argued that, “the machine must be harnessed and


Ibid., 211. Jaffe would have known. He served as a lead lawyer in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration before joining the National Labor Relations Board as an attorney in 1935.
run by those who can best run it.” A “legal realist”, Jaffe’s justifications for administrative devolution nevertheless veered into the metaphysical. Modern society demanded a seamless organic machine, and social harmony demanded participation from the state above and civic groups below: “individual will must find employment and expression.”

On the ground in tobacco country, the justifications for group participation in law making were less philosophical but no less deeply felt. Indeed, as this chapter highlights, the second Agricultural Adjustment Act amended to pass the constitutional muster in 1938, was perhaps even more corporatist than the first because the government facilitated the creation of a producer interest group to administer it. And so the boundary between public and private—so foundational to liberal visions of the state and laissez-faire visions of markets—remained as blurry as ever in tobacco country. The North Carolina Farm Bureau (NCFB) rose as the first “triple-A” fell in order to make sure that all farmers adhered to the rigid regulations on tobacco supply. Equally importantly, the institutionalization of the program of supply restriction shifted the primary question farmers sought to solve through organization. Before the New Deal, tobacco farmers were fixated on questions of production—either the marketing of tobacco (as in the cooperative experiments of the 1920s), or crop control. After acreage control was firmly in place, organized farmers could then focus on consumption. The order imposed by farmer-administered supply restriction allowed growers to explicitly articulate and seek to remedy an “under consumption problem.” The New Deal thus gave rise to a farmer-centered interest group that, having secured income parity, sought ways increase its

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7 Ibid., 253.
income. As co-administrators of tobacco policy—within the government—organized farmers worked to increase the consumption of cigarettes.

I. “Farmer Administration” as Institutional Elitism

The genius of federal tobacco policy was that it institutionalized traditional hierarchy under the banner of farmer representation and participation. That is, the most democratic element of the tobacco program—the belt-wide referendum authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to impose production limits—justified its hierarchical tendencies. The Schechter decision invalidated the institutionalized hierarchy of the NRA’s industrial codes. Chief Justice Hughes’ opinion was scornful of what neoclassical economists might call the legalization of “rent seeking” on the part of trade associations. “Could trade groups,” Hughes wondered rhetorically, “be constituted [as] legislative bodies…because such associations or groups are familiar with the problems of their enterprises?”8 The Court said no. But the very same economic pattern of law making and administration by interested oligopolies—in tobacco country, the more prosperous farmers—persisted.

In rural areas, domination by elites was nothing new. Since Jamestown, the prerogatives of tobacco planters had determined the spatial, labor, and legal landscape of the nation. Though part of a cluster of decisions that brought an end to the “first” New Deal, Butler did not disrupt the way tobacco policy operated in North Carolina. As one cynical farm woman put it, “The Agriculture Department has…done a whole lot of

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talking, but mighty little effective work, except for a certain special interest.”

Small, politically inconsequential farmers were certainly gratified to finally receive attention to their plight—or, at least a price floor at auction. But they knew full well that they were not the kind of folks whose opinion was sought and valued by policymakers. The seamlessness of action between local agricultural officials and local elites was even more apparent in the administration of compulsory control, which included a range of tasks including determining the “base acreage” for thousands of farmers, revising and adjusting these figures, reviewing appeals, and, most importantly, disbursing checks. Extension Service tobacco specialist E.Y. Floyd headed these operations in North Carolina. County extension agents, who had long relied on connections to the most prosperous farmers, were the field-force of the AAA, representing the program at the community level. These agents selected growers to serve on the county and community committees which assisted Extension in operating the program. These committees turned local elites into local officials. They helped disseminate and administer AAA plans locally. Their most important, visible and controversial task was verifying the accuracy of “base acreages” after farmers submitted field measurements to the tobacco section. Fudging and favoritism were hardly concealed at this stage of policy. A Brookings Institution report commissioned by Wallace for each of the commodity programs concluded that many tobacco growers “deliberately padded their acreage and production figures to obtain financial benefits which would accrue from having a larger base.”

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9 Serena Elizabeth Ashford to O.M. Gardner, 7 April 1930, Folder- “Crop Report,” Box 54, Papers of Governor O. Max Gardner at the (hereafter Gardner Papers), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (NCDAH).

committeemen charged with authenticating these figures frequently vouched for fabricated numbers submitted by kin, friends, and neighbors. Once allotments were assigned—a fixed percentage of the base acreage—there was little dissatisfied farmers could do. Those who complained to their extension agents or congressmen were referred back to the very committees that they believed had jilted them in the first place.

The system of acreage reduction and committee review disadvantaged small farmers in several ways. Small farmers objected to the horizontal acreage reduction of the emergency 1933 contract. As a county agent explained in a letter to Governor Ehringhaus, small farmers “feel that the authorities should not require a 4 acre planter to reduce any until the man who is planting from 8 to 10 acres out of 15 is reduced to 4.” That is, the flat reduction was regressive, placing a greater burden on poorer farmers than on richer ones. Sign-up campaigns proceeded slowest in precisely those Piedmont counties where farmers tended to cultivate less in cash crops. The geography of the AAA’s support and opposition underscores the political and economic swing in the tobacco belt. The Tri-State Cooperative succeeded precisely where crop control was the most burdensome; conversely, crop control was most popular among just the same men who did the most to undermine the cooperative. Elite growers in the eastern part of the state knew just what kind of incentive structures needed to be in place to induce compliance with acreage reduction. Absent the “incentive” of a stiff-tax on those who produced above their allotment, crop control could not succeed as a long term income-propping strategy—a behavioral fact that eastern North Carolina growers were sensible to

because of the Cooperative’s lack of such an incentive. Having consolidated around acreage reduction, the tobacco nexus was poised and powerful enough to fight for the best terms possible for the tobacco program’s implementation.

But the Agricultural Adjustment Act was not without its critics, especially outside the Coastal Plain. Their criticisms echoed the Court’s observation that delegating legislative privilege to the most significant economic players was not fair. Farmers who had, at the onset of the Depression, heeded Governor O. Max Gardner’s call to “live-at-home” were hurt the most by acreage reduction. It struck many as unfair that the farmers who practiced “balanced farming” were punished for their stewardship efforts. These farmers, largely based in the hilly Piedmont, were essentially punished for diversifying their production before January 1, 1933—the date upon which allotments would be calculated. Big landlords to the east, by contrast, were rewarded for their dedication to monoculture, and that dedication was locked into place by the Agricultural Adjustment Act itself.

Clarence Poe was animated by the yeoman vision of farming embodied in the types of farms near his newspaper’s Raleigh offices. The *Progressive Farmer* became one of the greatest boosters and critics of the AAA—reminding all farmers of their prosperity under the program, but also detailing its abuses, at least its abuses to white farmers. It never missed an opportunity to encourage farmers to attend an AAA informational meeting and sign over acreage; but it also proposed detailed revisions to tobacco policy that would enable the “little man to live.” While acknowledging that the AAA “has produced wonderful results for southern farmers” with a “program so magnificent that it should have the support of all friends of agriculture,” Poe nonetheless
suggested that not enough had been done for “the two or three-horse, one family farm.”

What was at stake in the New Deal tobacco policy was nothing less than “the right of the little man to live,” despite the fact that “this may mean much heavier…acreage cuts on the part of wealthier landowners for whom farming is a commercialized business rather than a way of life.”  

Several months later, a sympathetic “little man” wrote to the paper and said it even more simply: “the small farmer has not been consulted or allowed a fair voice in the AAA program.”

Congressmen and administrators were well aware of the squeeze that crop reduction placed on small farmers. The 1934 Kerr-Smith Tobacco Act attempted to ameliorate these inequalities by allowing counties additional acreage with the stipulation that a portion of the bonus must go to small growers; subsequent revisions in 1935, 1938 and 1939 went to even greater lengths to protect farmers and allow them to increase their allotments fractionally. The problem was tenancy. At least that’s what officials claimed. Tobacco section chief Jack Hutson explained the AAA’s unwillingness to broach any broad overhaul of the calculation of base acreages on the grounds that any attempt to help small farmers would come out of the allotment of large operators. This, in turn, would simply cause them to eliminate tenants—which is just what had happened under AAA cotton policy. “You would really hit the lowest people on the ladder,” Hutson explained. Given the administrative enormity of establishing, verifying, adjusting and compensating tobacco allotments, Hutson and other officials likely also did not want to

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14 *Progressive Farmer*, October 1934.
add another layer to an already complex process, another opening wedge for complaints. But, most importantly, incorporated as part of the state, large landowners were not going to sacrifice themselves in the name of the noble yeoman.

The tobacco section’s professed concern for sharecroppers and tenants was not entirely a fig leaf covering elite interests. Tobacco policy was more insistent on fairness for tenants than the notoriously oligarchic cotton section. Beginning in 1935, payments were made directly to all growers—tenants and sharecroppers, black and white—and not just to landlords. Tenant displacement was thus less of a problem in tobacco than in cotton. Contracts stipulated that tenants could not be removed because of acreage reduction, but, of course, it was not difficult for a landlord to contrive other reasons for letting a tenant go. Everybody—from committeemen to the Extension Service—was aware of the possibility of this problem. It was, after all, why the policy seemed to disadvantage white small farmers in favor of poor black sharecroppers. But the Extension Service was unwilling to become an arbiter of tenure disputes. Agents were exhausted, overworked, and reliant on friendly relations with the landlord class. It cannot be emphasized enough that the displacement problem was not comparable to what existed in the cotton belt. Tenant-operated tobacco farms fell by just 10% in the 1930s, whereas according to one survey of the Delta belt in Arkansas, more than 30% of tenants were displaced as a result of the New Deal. More importantly, while the number of tenants in North Carolina fell during the 1930s, the number of small owner-operators actually grew, nearly offsetting the tenant loss. Tobacco looks better by contrast not because of any particularly administrative genius, but because of technological backwardness. Cotton

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17 Badger, Prosperity Road, 203.
landlords took government checks and bought machines that did the work of scores of tenants. No such labor-saving devices were available on tobacco farmers until well into the 1950s. When machines could replace mules and men, they did. Until then, tobacco farmers faced persistent labor shortages at harvest time. 18

As in cotton, however, black farmers suffered the brunt of the tobacco program’s injustices. As historian Adrienne Petty has shown, black farmers, regardless of tenure status, incurred greater acreage reduction and received less benefit payment than whites. 19 The wide administrative latitude of the farmer-committees produced resentment at whites who benefitted from the AAA at the expense of blacks. As one black tobacco farmer put it, white committeemen gave black farmers “a couple of acres” but gave “Mr. Charlie all he wants.” 20 Any African American tobacco grower who got a couple of acres may have been doing fairly well after all, though. Black farmers were more invisibly discriminated against because they simply did not grow enough tobacco to participate. Farmers could not qualify for any form of payment unless they produced at least one acre of tobacco before 1933. In so far as the AAA entrenched pre-existing power—particularly the power of the landlords whose acres black growers worked—it was racially discriminatory. But it was also a major change in the way tobacco country operated and may have produced subtle reconfigurations in the way black farmers understood and confronted the social and political order. For instance, tenants, both black

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18 For a discussion of the administration and response to cotton policy under the New Deal see, Nate Shaw, All God’s Dangers; the Life of Nate Shaw (New York: Knopf, 1974); Donald H. Grubbs, Cry from the Cotton; the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union and the New Deal (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971); Robin D. G Kelley, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Sidney Baldwin, Poverty and Politics; the Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).
20 Ibid., 71.
and white, voted in control referenda. While black tenants were expected to ratify control in line with the wishes of their landlords, they still voted, still attended bi-racial farmers’ meetings at which crop control was explained, and still had greater contact with the sources and operators of power, unfair though it was.  

For some scholars, the anti-democratic, elitist and racist localism of the AAA’s administration undermined any reformist claims of the New Deal, dovetailing with a historiography that has largely focused on how the Roosevelt era missed opportunities to achieve broader social reform. The “purge” of the liberals within the ranks of the AAA, the USDA’s absorption of the reform-oriented FSA and RA cut off the trickle of genuinely egalitarian ideas for the countryside. “I don’t remember that anyone came and discussed the sociological aspects of the problem of the farmers,” Hutson recalled. “Certainly if they did come there were many more that were emphasizing the economic aspects of it.” The New Deal did what it said it was going to do for tobacco: raise tobacco prices and therefore farm income. But as it did so, tobacco policy intensified social hierarchy even as it benefitted those at the bottom.

Of course, the first AAA was not invalidated on the same grounds as NIRA. When United States v. Butler invalidated the Agricultural Adjustment Act it did so on the grounds that the processing tax was an impermissible redistribution of wealth: tobacco manufacturers and distributors could not be made to shoulder the cost of supply restriction. While the Butler decision affected farmers, it was actually about food and fiber processors, and the rules governing the relationship between states and the federal

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21 Anthony J Badger, Prosperity Road, 225.
23 Reminiscences of John B. Hutson, 144-145, COHC.
government. Farmers were merely the beneficiaries of these new configurations. “The sole object of the legislation,” wrote Justice Owen Roberts on behalf of the six-man majority, is “to take money from the processor and bestow it upon farmers.” The Court was thus silent on the question of the farmers themselves, identifying the constitutional question of the AAA not in the monopoly power granted to farmers, but in whether or not the tax on producers should actually have been considered a tax. “A tax in the general understanding of the term, and as it is used in the Constitution, signifies an exaction of support of the Government.” In the Court’s eyes, the processing tax was not a tax in the proper sense of the term. It was an “expropriation of money from one group for the benefit of another”—specifically for the benefit of farmers. And though processors monies were paid to the Treasury, “the exaction cannot be wrested out of its setting.”

Despite striking down the processing tax, Butler affirmed the right of Congress to achieve legislative aims that contributed to the “general welfare through its taxing and spending power.” And so the second AAA raised revenue for the rental and benefit payments due to farmers through general appropriations. The revised Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 thus shifted the source of the money inputs that made production control possible. But the Court did not, as it did in the Schechter case, render a verdict on the permissibility of private groups of farmers to engage in public administration. By invalidating the first Agricultural Adjustment Act, Butler did not disrupt the corporatist configuration of the agricultural economy. Indeed, on the ground, the uncertainty caused by the Supreme Court’s decision actually strengthened the position of agricultural elites.

25 Idem.
Akin to the major firms who stood to benefit the most the NRA’s experiments in industrial self-governance, organized tobacco farmers began to use their proximity to government to advocate for pro-cigarette policies. At the same time, the inequalities that inhered to commodity corporatism were further entrenched in the second AAA.

II. Growing Lobbyists: The Development of the North Carolina Farm Bureau

The North Carolina Farm Bureau (NCFB) was created by the necessity of maintaining crop control in a new era of the tobacco program’s post-Butler uncertainty. The Extension Service—dubbed the “field service of the AAA”—had always needed help in promoting, explaining and administering tobacco policy. As the future of a program that had begun to work well for them was jeopardized by the Court’s ruling, Eastern Carolina elites were more than willing to assist the Extension Service in the discharge of its duties. Since the 1929 crash, the same cadre of tobacco elites organized the tobacco economy in conjunction with congressmen, the governor, and the Extension Service. They were appointed by Gardner to the Tobacco Relief Commission, by the Extension Service to the Growers’ Advisory Committee, and they were given a role in the policy creation and administration process in Washington. As historian Anthony Badger points out, the “AAA deliberately fostered and later institutionalized the growth of a growers’ pressure group.”27 In this interest-group formation he rightly sees the hand of the federal government. But farmer-advisors were already a self-selected, semi-public bunch. The Extension Service, which since the days of the Tri-State Cooperative had relied upon free and fluid relationships with the most progressive farmers, was a key

27 Badger, Prosperity Road, 169.
handmaiden to the birth of the tobacco nexus. In the harried and uncertain days during the fall of 1933, the Extension Service turned to the same type of men it had always relied upon to disseminate information and coordinate the movements of scattered farmers. Because of the failure of cooperative marketing, their political connections to Governors Gardner and Ehringhaus, and their enthusiasm for acreage reduction, prominent landlords, warehousemen and merchants gladly met the Extension Service more than half way.

I am not the first scholar to point out that the Extension Service relied on cozy relationships with elite farmers. Nearly all accounts of the abuses under the cotton section of the AAA highlight the “alliance between land-grant universities, the Extension Service, the Farm Bureau, the Department of Agriculture and Southern politicians” that “encouraged commercial farmers at the expense of the tenant class.” But these same scholars insist on determining whether or not policy—or its perverse application—was attributable to government or special interests. This tendency is particularly visible in how historians assess the most immediate and morally troubling results of the AAA: human displacement. But the North Carolina Farm Bureau epitomized the hybridity of state-society institutions. The development of a state-fostered interest group should be

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considered a natural outgrowth of corporatist political configurations and not the perverse capture of a government agency. The interpenetration of public and private resources and actors was a constitutive feature of tobacco’s political economy.

The Farm Bureau rose when the first Agricultural Adjustment Act fell in early 1936. The opinion handed down by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Butler* made everybody in tobacco country nervous, but was even more disquieting for those who had prospered the most from rigid crop control. The North Carolina Farm Bureau was established to fill the breach, to order the countryside when disorder seemed imminent. The NCFB was founded in Pitt County, whose seat was Greenville, that major marketing town where the AAA’s second man in-charge, Con Lanier, once served as mayor.

The NCFB’s representation of prominent farmers and agribusiness elites was consistent with the history, reputation, and policy orientation of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Founded in a Chamber of Commerce in upstate New York in 1911, the Farm Bureau was greatly expanded with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which established the county agent system of agricultural extension. In its earliest incarnation, the Farm Bureau, a private interest group, was institutionally indistinct from the Extension Service.\(^{31}\) In many states, particularly in the Midwest, county extension agents were also Farm Bureau agents who organized local and state chapters of the pressure group. A historian of the Farm Bureau has characterized this cozy relationship as “one of informal reciprocity.” Through networks and knowledge so tacit that it did not need to be spelled out, “the Farm Bureau gave political support” to the aims of the Extension Service, and the “Extension Service in turn gave whatever aid it could to the

Again, interest group participation in the process of agricultural administration did not represent a “capture” of government resources. The young Farm Bureau and the just-younger Extension Service grew up side by side, the composition of each affecting the other.

The American Farm Bureau Federation became a federated national organization in 1919 after representatives from twelve states determined that it was time “to provide the nation with some sane organization thoroughly representative of agriculture throughout the United States.” This would allow it to “take advantage of a nation-wide organization which promises great possibilities of usefulness in developing a program which…will bring into action the strongest farmers of the nation.” The vision of the interest group in its earliest days was elitist, operating with the understanding that the “strongest farmers” were those on whose behalf policy should be made. Indeed, the history of the Farm Bureau federation validates political scientist E.E. Schattschneider’s wry assessment of interest group pluralism. When organized farmers came together to press their interests in both “private” channels and through public institutions, they did so “with a strong upper-class accent.”

The lobby opened its Washington office the following year and made its mark quickly, supporting Aaron Sapiro’s cooperative marketing by helping to secure passage of the “magna carta of cooperation” in the Capper Volstead Act. The AFBF’s chief lobbyist, Gray Silver, organized meetings with corn belt Congressmen that ultimately

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32 Ibid., 7-8.
resulted in the formation of the Farm Bloc, which devoted much of its political capital to advocating for the McNary-Haugen legislation.\(^{35}\)

The Farm Bureau’s fast accomplishments and maverick techniques as a pressure group were impressive, even if overstated by Bureau boosters. The lobby claimed credit for the popular AAA, Bureau spokesmen re-iterating in print and in front of crowds that the AAA was, essentially, the AFBF’s program all along; the President just had sense enough to adopt it.\(^{36}\) One New Deal planner saw things a bit differently: “The Farm Bureau never creates anything. It supports.”\(^{37}\) But the organization’s support for the Extension Service as the ground troops of the AAA was creative, indeed, at least in North Carolina. With huge numbers of AAA contract signers, but small numbers of Farm Bureaus, the South was ripe for cultivation by the AFBF. The group’s Chicago-based national offices eyed the region hungrily. Outside of Alabama, the home state of the president of the AFBF, membership was scanty in the South, and, most importantly, the Farm Bureau had few relationships with Extension Service directors in the region. In 1935, a massive membership drive was launched, with a particular focus on courting State Extension Service directors. Bureau president Ed O’Neal considered North Carolina a particular prize in the southern membership drive, the key to building a truly national Farm Bureau.\(^{38}\) As with the Tri-State Tobacco Growers’ Cooperative and the Tobacco Growers’ Association, North Carolina Extension Service worked with the most willing, organized farmers to disseminate farming information. But AFBF organizers found Extension Director Dean Schaub initially “hard to move.” In all likelihood, though, the

\(^{36}\) Campbell, *Farm Bureau and the New Deal*, 56.
\(^{37}\) Idem.
\(^{38}\) Campbell, *Farm Bureau and the New Deal*, 85-95.
overextended director was simply not moving fast enough for AFBF missionaries. Once a local Farm Bureau chapter formed in Greenville, Schaub devoted himself to facilitating membership.

Like so many chapters before it, the North Carolina Farm Bureau was created with the Extension Service. Shortly after the United States v. Butler decision was issued, the Extension agent in Pitt County organized leading farmers to brainstorm ideas about what type of program might replace the first Agricultural Adjustment Act should it be struck down. The Extension Service was as invested as prominent growers in eastern North Carolina about securing a comprehensive program post-Butler. The Agricultural Adjustment Act had increased the importance and funding of the agency, and had raised to a level of policy importance a job that had once been akin to that of a traveling farm equipment dealer. The reformulation of the tobacco program through an elite-driven committee of interested white men illustrates the persistence of corporatism in the “Second” New Deal. The cartelizing efforts that were deemed unconstitutional in the industrial sector received no such condemnation in agriculture. The Supreme Court struck down the processing tax, but not the processes of farmer administration.

Farmers and extension agents in eastern North Carolina pulled together a mass meeting in Greenville in February 1936. American Farm Bureau Federation President Ed O’Neal was there to rile up his would-be base: the hundreds of farmers who had time enough to attend organizational meetings, who were white enough to join the segregated Farm Bureau, who were male enough to count as members of the patriarchic organization, who were educated enough to know that their participation in a farm organization could mean tangible benefits through tobacco policy. As was customary
any time tobacco farmers gathered, resolutions were passed. The wealthy farmers and businessmen present committed themselves to any federal program of tobacco acreage control, demanding, by way of incentive to any farmers wavering on the issue that the availability of credit be contingent upon acreage reduction. The NCFB was born as a single-issue organization. How a farmer felt about rigid crop control would likely tell you how he felt about the Farm Bureau.

Riding a wave of intense farmer anxiety, the North Carolina Farm Bureau gained a foothold where it mattered. J.E. Winslow, a prominent Pitt country farmer, was the group’s first chairman. Winslow was no stranger to pressure group administration. He had already served on the Tobacco Growers’ Association, the group coordinated to advise the governor during the early years of the AAA. Prior to operating his large farm, Winslow had been a banker, a newspaper writer, and a business owner. He was exactly the kind of businessman-farmer that the NCFB most appealed to. Three of the initiators of the emergency meeting demanding that Governor Ehringhaus close the markets back in 1933, including the president of the Tobacco Growers’ Association, would become founding members of the NCFB. Extension Director Schaub, who had disappointed national Farm Bureau officials in Chicago as being slow to move, was an enthusiastic convert to the Farm Bureau once he saw that it could fill stadiums with thousands of farmers. With membership growing at the country and state level, Ed O’Neal focused on the Tobacco Section in Washington, courting Hutson at a conference with Schaub and prominent farmers. All were gratified by the administrator’s warm reception. The AFBF

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40 Campbell, *New Deal and the Farm Bureau*, 95-96.
saw the incorporation of North Carolina as “historic,” the fruitful result of a “pretty heavy” gamble.\textsuperscript{41}

The tobacco nexus solidified in the early years of the North Carolina Farm Bureau, where early meeting minutes reveal the presence of Extension Service and AAA officials. The Extension Director, a few county agents, and the Extension Service’s marketing and tobacco specialist were all reliably present for these meetings, some of which were held in the county agent’s office. Immediately this relationship gave the NCFB entrée to the construction of tobacco policy and administration. Winslow accompanied Schaub to a policy meeting in Memphis, where the details of the new Soil Conservation program were being worked out.\textsuperscript{42}

With the revision of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration as part of the 1938 Farm Act, Farm Bureau members in North Carolina got the strict crop control that they wanted. But it came at a short-term cost. The Farm Bureau’s guiding hand in the 1938 law, its close relationship with the Extension Service, and the increasingly obvious collaboration between the prominent growers and government officials caused a “revolt of the little man” when farmers rejected compulsory control in the 1938 referendum. The tobacco portion of the Farm Act authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to set marketing quotas after considering crop carry-over and prospective demand. Non-signers faced tough sanctions: they were hit with a 50% penalty tax and were ineligible to receive low-interest loans from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

In light of the major overhaul, many growers did not understand how their quota was determined, and procedures enacted to alleviate farmer discontent seemed only to

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{42} “1936 Minutes.” N.d., Folder 14, Box 9, NCFB Records. NCSU.
cause more confusion and make things worse. One North Carolina official charged with executing the math of the quota-determining equations as much as admitted the Act’s bungled administration. He called the ’38 calculations his best technical achievement on paper, despite the fact that “some how the quotas never quite fitted.” If a technocrat conceded the inaccessibility of his work, it is little wonder that many farmers felt their bewilderment and insecurity sliding into outrage.

Amidst all the confusion, one thing was clear. When the markets opened in late summer, prices were lower than growers expected. Ideally, market prices were to be higher than the government price-floor. When they were not, it suggested to some farmers that crop control was not making good on its one promise: to raise their income. If it could not do that, what was the point in continuing the program, particularly as owners of small allotments in the central and western parts of the state could only grow a tiny amount of tobacco? For skeptics of the program, its endorsement by the Farm Bureau only confirmed that it was an elitist concoction, written by and for the benefit of Farm Bureau members. To borrow Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes’ condemnation of NIRA’s cartelization, the reformulation of quota was authored by “groups most familiar” with the administrative enterprise. Whenever the Farm Bureau, Extension or AAA touted the benefits of crop control, skeptics could easily suggest “discriminations against the small farmers.”

Agrarian democracy was put to the test in December 1938, when a vote was held, per legislative mandate, to determine whether or not crop control would be in force for

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43 Badger, *Prosperity Road*, 162-164.
44 Idem.
the 1939 season. The result was a populist condemnation of corporatism. Just 57% of quota holders vote in favor of the program’s implementation the following year, short of the 2/3 majority required for its continuation. A form of rural mal-apportionment actually worked to the benefit of these small growers, as referenda voters were tallied to the man, not to the acre. Small growers were not authors or administrators of the program, but they had an outsized influence at the ballot box. Agrarian democracy—the referendum—lay bare the terms of the corporatist arrangement. The terms of a rigid social compact in which prominent men could make decisions on behalf of an entire sector were acceptable only when those decisions appeared to work to everyone’s benefit. When tobacco country was polled on whether or not it approved of an elite-dominated program that could not even deliver “the goods” (higher incomes), it responded with a resounding no.

Ironically, the apparent defeat for the Farm Bureau ultimately vindicated corporatist arrangements, and “farmer democracy” enabled elites to achieve uninterrupted dominance over tobacco policy. Predictably, farmers greatly expanded their production in 1939—responding to the same incentives that had governed production before 1933, and before the cooperative experiment more than a decade earlier. And in returning to those same patterns, farmers were greeted by the same collective action problem. Acreage grew by 40%, while yields per acre also increased. The result was a precipitous drop in the price per pound of tobacco. Average prices in 1939 were more than 30 percent less

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46 Ibid., 560.
than they were in 1938. The 14.9 cents for a pound of tobacco that farmers received in 1939 was less, even, than what they had been guaranteed in 1935. 47

Even before the markets opened in 1939, the rules for calculating quota, akin to the industrial codes that had cartelized industry earlier in the decade, were revised to ameliorate the evident discontent of smaller farmers.48 Too much was at stake in crop control—namely the predictability of the price floor and all of the emotional and material security that went along with being able to envision an approximate yearly income—to risk a populist revolt right back into the uncontrolled market. What agricultural economists and planners envisioned as “democratic collective control” could only succeed if the “democratic” and “control” elements of farmer-administration could strike a workable balance.49 The 1938 quota calculation had not passed democratic muster. But democracy, as farmers learned, did not offer economic certainties.

The price disaster of September 1939 was ultimately superseded by another, larger problem: the outbreak of war in Europe, which prompted British buyers to leave the auction floors. Britain was the single most important export market for tobacco, particularly for the more expensive grades of flue-cured. Unlike American cigarettes, which were made with a blend of flue-cured and burley tobaccos, British smokes were made purely of flue-cured tobacco.50 Between 1934 and 1938, the United Kingdom consumed an average of 200 million pounds yearly on flue-cured tobacco. The next

47 Data taken from Table 60, Laverne Creek et. al., U.S. Tobacco Statistics, 1935-92. (Washington, D.C.:U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Commodity Economics Division, 1994), 73. See Appendix, Figure 3.1 and 3.2.
48 Badger, Prosperity Road, 182.
largest consumer of flue-cured tobacco was Canada, where factories churned out cigarettes made with only 27 million pounds of flue-cured.\textsuperscript{51} At this moment of crisis, Hutson’s overseas experience was of direct and unexpected valuable to farmers. While surveying the European tobacco scene earlier in the decade, Hutson had become friendly with the director of the Imperial Tobacco Company, Britain’s largest buying concern. Well aware that the company’s absence would spark panic in the tobacco belt, the director of the Imperial contacted Hutson with advance warning of the news. This gave the AAA administrator time to meet with tobacco leadership in Raleigh to work out a quick response. Even though the majority of tobacco farmers had voted against current tobacco administration, the tobacco nexus was the only group of individuals organized and authoritative enough to respond in what could have been a market-destroying emergency. Indeed, as numerous scholars have suggested, corporative economic arrangements tend to work best in moments of emergency—or, as historian Ellis Hawley explains, “corporative structures and attitudes” have thrived “as a means of coping with” crises of “coordination and legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{52} Corporatist political economy reemerged at the very moment of its democratic invalidation because it offered something more important than democracy to farmers: stability.


In early September of 1939, the governors of tobacco producing states closed the auction markets, halting the buyers and auctioneers in their tracks as they rode the auction circuit. But just a few days later, Hutson, AAA officials, treasury representatives and members of the Tobacco Growers Association had worked out a rescue plan. The Commodity Credit Corporation, the government financing entity authorized to borrow money from the Treasury to administer agricultural programs, bought the entire British share of tobacco. This put money directly into growers’ hands, while still offering the British buyers the ability to later purchase their share of tobacco, which was currently being stored at taxpayer expense. The British tobacco bailout was the best possible advertisement for corporatist control: the threat of ruin ameliorated by public-private collaboration. The swift action of elite growers and the sure hand of the federal government resulted in an emphatic affirmation of crop control when another referendum was held in December of 1939. Business owners, merchants, bankers, Chambers of Commerce in eastern Carolina joined Con Lanier, Farm Bureau officials, Extension agents, congressmen, the governor and even Clarence Poe in urging farmers to vote “yes” on crop control. Full page advertisements paid for by an eastern North Carolina bank made the appeal clearly: “Would you refuse to be rescued? Face Saving or Shirt Saving. Would you lose your shirt to save your face? Hoovercarts or Automobiles? You must decide.” And decide they did. In the October 5, 1939 referendum greater than 90 percent of voters in North Carolina approved production control, and never voted against it again.

53 Quoted in Badger, *Prosperity Road*, 186.
Perhaps elites in the eastern belt sensed that now was their chance to tip the scale even further on the side of “control” in the quivering balance between democracy and security. Claude Hall, a Farm Bureau member and the president of the Tobacco Growers’ Association, secured congressional support for longer-term crop control. Instead of voting yearly to trigger marketing restrictions—and raising nagging issues about the program’s administration during months-long campaigns—farmers would be bound for three years by the outcome of intermittent referenda. Advocates of small, family farms campaigned against intermittent referenda. Clarence Poe and The Grange, an older farm organization with support primarily among smallholders in the Western part of the state, continued to decry the use of the “historic base” as a means of calculating allotments.  

But a farm paper could not afford to antagonize elite readership, and the Farm Bureau wanted Poe’s endorsement. Though the editor and his fellow Grangers had supported the pro-small farmer Farm Security Administration, which the Farm Bureau had helped to kill, both the North Carolina Farm Bureau and the American Farm Bureau Federation were solicitous of Poe’s goodwill. Voting less than a year after their rescue by corporatist initiatives, tobacco farmers were ready to trade in a measure of freedom for what they believed to be even greater measure of stability. Eighty seven percent of tobacco holders in North Carolina favored the extension of crop control, validating, even as it perhaps chiseled away at it, the claim that agricultural adjustment was a plan for farmer-democracy.

54 Progressive Farmer, February 1940, 59.
55 Campbell, Farm Bureau and the New Deal, 98-99.
56 Badger, “Prosperity Road,” 192.
III. Planting Seeds, Growing Smokers

Little Tobacco coalesced around crop control. Paradoxically, acreage restriction was an expansive policy even as it physically froze tobacco production. For that very reason it drew tobacco growers directly into conversations about tobacco consumption. Tobacco farmers could only increase production if the Secretary of Agriculture raised the total amount of tobacco that could be marketed tax-free. He did this on the basis of demand information. As Claude Hall put it before Congress in 1934, “we do not ascribe to the theory that there is such an enormous over production, but on the other side there is a great under consumption.”\(^{57}\) Why, after all, were farmers even being asked to control their crop? Because people were not consuming enough tobacco. In short, farmers began to grow cigarettes and to advocate policies they believed might stimulate demand, such as reducing the product’s tax burden. This drew farmers into closer connection with tobacco companies. Before Congressional subcommittees and in the press, farmers began to cultivate what was perhaps their most important commodity: their own image. The image of the family tobacco grower was the ultimate cover crop. He was worthy of government attention because of his independence.

The fight to reduce cigarette taxes brought the tobacco nexus into conversation and occasionally even harmony with tobacco manufacturers. With their economic lives on more sure footing, perhaps growers were able to put aside their historic hatred of the tobacco companies to pursue an issue of mutual interest. Specifically, though, the New Deal opened a new chapter in the anti-cigarette-tax movement in two ways. First, in

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fostering a growers’ organization, the New Deal enabled a highly organized tobacco industry to find a direct—if not representative—point of contact with growers. In order for farmers to appear before Congress, an organized network of farmers had to exist. There would have been no anti-tax lobbying had coherent farmer organization not existed in North Carolina. Secondly, supply restriction focused growers on consumption, giving farmers an interest in stimulating demand for the sticks. A comparison of two efforts to combat cigarette taxes—once in 1934 and again in 1941—shows the evolution and increasing sophistication of Little Tobacco, specifically a growing appreciation for the political power of the farmer.

Tobacco Section chief John Hutson was deeply interested in cigarette consumption, always referencing the broader consumer market, both domestic and international, in explaining his agency’s decisions. When the AAA announced a higher production cap for 1935, growers, flush with money from a very constricted crop, and all too cognizant of the dangers of overproduction, were nervous. “Why not continue the acreage and production of flue-cured tobacco that brought such high prices?” the *Progressive Farmer* asked. In his article answering the foil, Hutson explained in terms that tied cigarette consumption to flue-cured crop production. “Domestic cigarette consumption last year went up 10%. Present indications are that domestic consumption of flue-cured tobacco will be larger in 1935 than during any previous year—maybe near 300 million pounds.”

Ironically, while critics of government agriculture programs have cited the fact that they insulate farmers from market forces, creating protectionism-induced ignorance, the federal tobacco program actually drew farmers into a better understanding

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of global demand for their crop. Before production control, growers were not producing for a market at all; they were not trying to meet demand for cigarettes with thought to supplying for a market beyond the ones where auctioneers sang. They were just trying to produce as much as they could because that was the only sure-fire way to make money. Under production control, AAA leaders had to justify quotas, explain demand, and make explicit the connection between seed and smoke.

Hutson knew firsthand European tobacco markets, and he also gave special attention to foreign cigarette consumption in speeches, articles, and meetings explaining the program to warehousemen and growers. The crop’s reliance on export markets, and Hutson’s expert knowledge of trade trends and flows assured that the entirety of the tobacco outlook was considered in making recommendations to Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace for adjusting production quotas. Hutson continued to seriously study the global tobacco trade even as tobacco section administrator. He literally wrote the book on “Consumption and Production of Tobacco in Europe”—a 115-page detailed examination of industry trends for each European country—during the 1930s.

The international focus of Hutson’s work also may have helped to quell fears of conservative critics of the New Deal agriculture policy. Hutson may have seemed like a broad thinking man, a man sensitive to the importance of maintaining international markets in an era in which many nations were wrapping themselves in protectionist flags. Some conservatives, like North Carolina Senator Josiah Bailey, raised the question of

whether or not the AAA was “pricing farmers out of foreign markets”—elevating the cost of American leaf beyond the world price. Though he eventually supported the Kerr-Smith tobacco legislation, Bailey echoed manufacturers’ claims that the AAA would disrupt export markets. There was particular concern that the United Kingdom’s imperial preference policies, which provided favorable tariffs for empire-grown goods, would displace the United States as a source for flue-cured imports as Rhodesia and Canada developed their own tobacco fields.\(^6^1\) As one article in the anti-New Deal *North American Review* put it sarcastically in 1939, “the AAA succeeds—in helping foreign farmers.”\(^6^2\)

But, in fact, a greater degree of organization among farmers translated to a greater degree of harmony within the greater tobacco trade. The desire to expand markets—industry euphemism for courting more smokers—united the entire supply chain. In 1934, growers, manufacturers and Congressmen made the case that cigarettes were unjustly and excessively taxed; that tobacco, really, the tobacco farmer, had paid more than its fair share to the federal Treasury. Now producing for a market they could see more clearly, tobacco farmers sought to expand it.

In 1934, North Carolina representative Robert L. Daughton chaired the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. Wanting to do right by his constituents, and especially one particularly important constituent, “Muley” or “Farmer Bob” appointed a subcommittee to determine if the cigarette tax should be lowered. S. Clay Williams instigated this investigation. Williams was a lawyer, former president of R.J. Reynolds

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\(^6^1\) Hunter, “The AAA Between Neighbors,” 547.
and then vice-chair of the company’s board of directors. Though he opposed many aspects of the New Deal (particularly the AAA’s threat to open the books on manufacturer’s advertising costs), Williams appreciated the opportunity to realign the relationships between growers, the industry, and government. This apparent foresight may have come from the time he spent actually working within New Deal, serving as chair of the National Recovery Board. Williams knew by experience the power of organized trade associations working with the sanction of the government. He was, in effect, trying to create a new code through which the industry could operate. Williams seized the momentary goodwill, or at least the abatement of outright antipathy, between manufacturers and growers to broach the subject of a joint effort at tax reduction. If it had not been for the state’s fostering of a pressure group, Williams would not have been able to call upon organized growers to make the anti-tax case. As one observant leaf dealer put it, “never before have I seen manufacturers build up for themselves as much goodwill with the farmer and with the public generally as in the bright flue-cured districts since September 1933 until now.” Williams hoped to achieve a reduction in the WWI-era tax on tobacco. To finance the war, the tax on cigarettes was more than doubled from $1.25/thousand to $3.00/thousand. War-induced taxes on all other goods had come down, but the Treasury had begun its own tobacco addiction, as cigarette consumption increased markedly during and after the war.

64 Badger, Prosperity Road, 110.
65 An unintended consequence of this “sin tax” was a paradox that made tobacco a particularly hard addiction for the government to shake. If a sin tax worked, it failed to raise revenue; if it failed, then it was simply a regressive tax. In terms of revenue raising, it was better that people kept lighting up.
In early 1934, growers’ representatives invited Williams to a Tobacco Growers Association meeting. The farmers wanted more information on what grades of tobacco would be in demand by the manufacturers in the fall—they would disseminate this information to farmers who were making planting preparations. But the Reynolds executive came with his own ideas. At this meeting, Williams made the case for the tax reduction, emphasizing, of course, that all benefits would flow to farmers.\(^6^6\) It was probably not difficult to convince farmers to support this tax reduction. It made intuitive sense that more people would smoke if the habit were cheaper, and experts echoed this logic at mass meetings. Speaking to a group of farmers at Chatham, Virginia, AAA chief Hutson emphasized that a tax break on cigarettes could “result in the largest possible domestic consumption.”\(^6^7\) But it was a special achievement for the tobacco manufacturers to convince farmers to support the kind of tax reduction that firms wanted—a flat, horizontal, across-the-board tax reduction. The “Big Three”—Reynolds, American Tobacco, and Liggett & Myers—produced more expensive cigarettes and thus wanted a flat tax untied to the selling price of their “premium” brands. This type of tax had the benefit of reducing competition from independent manufacturers who operated on very narrow margins. The “independents” produced a cheaper pack of cigarettes, and wanted a differential reduction that would tax their economy brands at a lower rate than Big Three products. The tax-structure debate illustrated the benefits that could accrue to firms able to tailor regulation to their share of the trade. Hutson saw the anti-competitive tendencies of the horizontal tax reduction. He and AAA officials warned growers that a graduated tax would benefit farmers in the long run by “improv[ing] the competitive situation in the

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\(^6^6\)“Tobacco Tax Hearings,” 9.

\(^6^7\)Hutson, *Speeches*, 11.
industry.” The AAA’s position on taxes was a counterpoint to its position on acreage reduction. Much like the smaller independent tobacco companies, smallholders beseeched the AAA for differential acreage reduction; large growers, like large firms, advocated a flat acreage cut, which the AAA supported on the grounds of administrative simplicity, but also because tobacco law was written, implemented, and administered by elites.

Williams and the major manufacturers could make a much stronger argument to farmers because they could make a promise of immediate increase in demand for all grades of tobacco. In “numbers never before seen on Capitol Hill,” tobacco growers and manufacturers pled their case in front of a Ways and Means subcommittee in late March 1934. The hearings opened with a narration of the historic realignment that was taking place. Subcommittee chairman Fred Vinson, then just a lowly representative from Kentucky, noted that “according to the older residents of the congressional family here in Washington, this is the first time there has been an approach to the reduction of the tax on tobacco and tobacco products from the viewpoint of the grower.” Indeed, the manufacturers had, for several years, been agitating for the decrease in the cigarette tax, “claiming that increased sales resulting from lower imports would more than compensate the government for a tax reduction.” But a formal inquiry and hearing did not happen until the growers were enlisted in the campaign.

Farmers were best at making the anti-tax case, personifying the beleaguered crop. In anticipation of the hearings, the Atlanta Constitution editorialized that “tobacco is now

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68 Hutson, Speeches, 3; Chicago Daily Tribune, 26 May 1934, 25; Wall Street Journal, 2 August 1934, 1.
69 Baltimore Sun, 28 March 1934, 2.
70 “Tobacco Tax Hearings,” 1.
71 Wall Street Journal, 12 March 1934, 10.
the most heavily taxed farm commodity—if not commodity of any kind—with the producer being the chief victim.”\(^{72}\) The tobacco farmer was portrayed as paying for the sin (taxes) of the rest of the nation, as cigarettes were relied upon for “making up for the loss of governmental revenues during the prohibition era.”\(^{73}\) Even those who, like Hutson, did not support the flat tax, nonetheless accepted manufacturers’ claim that a tax reduction would be passed on to consumers, thus prompting more demand. As one Kentucky grower put it hopefully, “it is impossible to express my full conviction of the benefit of the reduction of the tax on tobacco…the growers…the manufacturers…the consumers…the Government….If the law be equitable it will help each and everyone.”\(^{74}\)

Of those groups, only the tobacco grower could tug at the heartstrings by pointing toward a history of deprivation and uncompensated labor vis-à-vis industry profit and government revenue. Only farmers, for instance, could claim that under the 1934 taxation rates, “the government [gets] 8 to 10 times the amount that it paid to the producer for the tobacco contained in the cigarette.”\(^{75}\) Only farmers could lace their pleas with rural imagery, descriptions of tough physical labor, arguing that the industry was carrying “a burden imposed upon them…often times with strained muscles and bended back and under heavy privation.”\(^{76}\) The farmer was the only figure that could make claims for the industry by appealing to his ennobled poverty.

Though he was hardly a member of the yeoman class, Claude Hall was an evocative spokesman for the plight of the grower. At times folksy, but always crafty, Hall painted a homespun picture. In his address to the subcommittee, Hall foregrounded not

\(^{72}\) *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 March 1934, 4C.
\(^{73}\) Idem.
\(^{74}\) “Tobacco Tax Hearings,” 3.
\(^{75}\) Idem.
\(^{76}\) Idem.
only the sweat of the individual farmer’s’ brow, but also the labor of the family farm—the working unit of rural life. He described the 13-month toil of “woman and children as well as the men, numbers of whom have insufficient food and clothing, working at times from 2 o’clock in the morning until 9 or 10 in the evening, and in curing seasons, all night.”77 Surely he knew that the subcommittee would be imagining the efforts of white families, the same kind of families perhaps imagined to have safeguarded the Republic in Jefferson’s days. Laying imagery aside, Hall then pivoted to an articulate analysis of the farmer’s place within the tobacco economy. Echoing the AAA’s language of consumption, Hall contended that “we do not subscribe to the theory that there is such enormous over production.” Instead, Hall insisted, “there is great underconsumption.” What about the price elasticity of tobacco? Hall explained that demand inelasticity “is largely true in the higher price cigarettes, but there is a large aggregate trade that will take cigarettes at 10 cents that will not take them at 15.” Lest congressmen believe they were in the middle of an agricultural economics lecture at North Carolina State, Hall closed his testimony with a beggar’s plea:

In conclusion, may I say that if Congress does not see fit to reduce the tax on cigarettes, if some other plan may be devised so that some of the revenue may be returned to the producer and the horn-handed son of the soil, to the extent that he may receive for his labor and the labor of his wife and children, in proportion to the wages received by other laborers, or better still, get the cost of production plus a fair profit, then you will have stayed the death sentence of the “goose that lays the golden egg.”78

77 Ibid., 7.
78 Ibid., 9.
Even though R.J. Reynolds’ Williams approached Hall regarding taxation, Hall’s deft *performance as an articulate farmer* set a precedent for future pilgrimages to Washington by Carolina growers.

Ultimately the subcommittee reported in favor of a 40% horizontal tax reduction. The subcommittee report was an affirmation of the tobacco farmer—a virtual invitation for industry and farmers to collaborate on future issues of mutual interest. The Congressmen explicitly wanted all benefits to accrue to growers, “without any thought or purpose that the tobacco manufacturers will retain any part of the taxes reduced.”79 The young romance with the grower was stillborn, however, when Treasury Secretary Morgenthau refused to consider such a tax reduction. He explained to Vinson that in light of the dire revenue situation, the Treasury could not afford to lose $75 million in order to give farmers $10 million.80

**Conclusion: Farmers Succeed in Washington**

Though they lost this battle, tobacco farmers gained something more lasting: the realization that organization could help them make money in Washington and from improved relations with manufacturers. Incorporation into the state during the New Deal made this possible: it produced a growers’ organization necessary for making political contact and mobilizing farmer sentiment; it gave farmers the vocabulary with which to talk about questions of consumption and demand; and it created the economic imperative, via crop control, to pursue new smokers.

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79 Badger, *Prosperity Road*, 102.
80 Idem.
Seven years later, growers again fought cigarette taxes. This time they successfully—if temporarily—staved off a tax increase that Congress was considering to fund the war effort. The coordination, preparation and sophistication of growers testifying before Congress suggested a wider, richer network of allies. Little Tobacco had grown to include Agriculture Commissioner Kerr Scott (who would later become governor and senator), an invigorated North Carolina Grange, the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation (NCFB), as well as the now-familiar grower statesmen Claude Hall and Con Lanier. Unlike the 1934 campaign, growers did not have to wait for Clay Williams to approach them. A week before the hearings, Scott was sent word that “something is brewing in [the] matter [of] taxes on tobacco,” and suggested that he contact the growers to “take part in said ‘something’.”

Though Scott would be an active lobbyist on behalf of tobacco in the upcoming years, in 1941 the growers were way ahead of their commissioner. Dozens of farmers, including the president of the NCFB, the master of the North Carolina Grange, members of the Tobacco Growers Advisory Committee, as well as other prominent growers and merchants, went to Washington to talk about taxation. Gone was any sense that the government should, in the words of the populist News and Observer editor, “get the money where the money is” by demanding that prosperous tobacco companies shoulder a greater tax burden. Many tobacco farmers had evidently accepted that tobacco firms should try to profit in any way they could. Farmer and Farm Bureau executive W.W. Eagles articulated the conservatism of the growers’ anti-tax position. “We all know that

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81 “Memorandum for WKS,” 21 April 1941, Folder- “Tobacco Taxes,” Box 56, Commissioner’s Papers, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, NCDAH.
the big companies operate in a business way, and we cannot blame them.” The farmers themselves pursued a rhetorical strategy that emphasized their outsider status and plainspoken, common-sense approach to their livelihoods.

The testimony of Con Lanier could have taught businessmen a thing or two about how to impress Congress. Oklahoma Democrat Wesley Disney called Lanier’s speech “one of the best, if not best, presentation of a man’s case that I have heard since I have been on the committee.” To this the normally salty Lanier demurred with thanks, noting that, “it comes from my heart.” Lanier’s heart was full enough of local color—mostly descriptions of the “vacant homes” in his “little country town of Greenville”—a town that was, by that date, the throbbing heart of the leaf trade, with all of the carnavalesque action that might be expected to accompany traveling salesmen and newly-flush farmers. But Lanier’s head was mostly full of sparkling clear facts and a savvy grip of the industry. “I am a tobacco grower,” Lanier began. “I come here today as representing the farmers of my country and my state. I know what they are thinking and… I am sure I speak their language.” Because the growers were opposing a tax to fund defense, it was important that the onetime Greenville mayor elaborate upon his patriotic bona fides. He touted his service as a “second lieutenant in a line infantry outfit in France.” And he assured the Congressmen that he would “not raise my voice in opposition to any tax that

83 Ibid., 722.
is necessary to defend this country and to put it in a state of preparedness.” Though he had served in Washington as Hutson’s number two in the tobacco section, Lanier emphasized instead his status as an outsider, not even bringing up his government service until several minutes into his speech. He described his position as only “up in Washington”—again drawing attention to the farmer as a down home outsider.  

The bulk of Lanier’s address was given to explaining the “great need” for “more markets.” With war disrupting the normal trade routes to Europe, extinguishing European cigarette smokers, “the only place where we can look to recoup our markets is our domestic market…and to some extent South America.” Much as he buried his past as a bureaucrat, Lanier did not mention the fact that the government, through the Commodity Credit Corporation, had intervened to mend the marketing hole left by the British buyers. The government was already purchasing and storing a great deal of tobacco at no cost to farmers in order to maintain the integrity of the tobacco market—to prevent, in fact, the collapse of Lanier’s hometown of Greenville and dozens of others where the entire economy was based upon tobacco money. Indeed, Lanier’s only reference to the government’s substantial and popular intervention into the tobacco economy was to emphasize acreage reduction as if it were a burden to bear, and not a form of price support for an industry formerly plagued by ruinous overproduction. “We have already been cut, gentleman, away down in our acreage, in our production,” Lanier lamented. “We have been cut 40 percent in the amount of tobacco we can produce.”

86 Ibid., 719.
87 Idem.
was on what “we,” the farmers, have done. Or, when referencing supply restriction, it was equally persuasive to emphasize what had been done to “us.”

Crop control was the perfect rhetorical foil. It allowed farmers to pioneer a strategy of representation that emphasized their victimhood by a policy that actually helped them and that they supported. The savviest farmers could use helpful government intervention to extract even more helpful concessions. Though he demonstrated facility with the history of tobacco taxation at the state, federal and even international level, exact knowledge of the amount and kind of tobacco used in cigarettes versus “roll your owns,” what Lanier really wanted Congressmen to remember was the “1,000,000 farmers in this country with their families that are dependent for a living upon the production and consumption of tobacco.”

Agile with policy, but perhaps equally deft with imagery, Lanier carefully covered the material reality of the tobacco economy with the dirt of the crop.

The agricultural tobacco network succeeded in 1941. It staved off the taxation increase through preparation and coordinated, expansive effort. This process of defensive lobbying rose above local bickering, organizational rivalries and long-felt historical and economic resentments. Perhaps local leadership realized that the defensive campaign against taxes was really an offensive push for markets, cigarettes, smokers. The end of the “first” New Deal did not spell the end of cartelization, at least not in the tobacco fields. Efforts to wrest control of the tobacco program from elites in the 1938 commodity control referendum—to put more emphasis on the “democracy” in “democratic collective control”—were abortive, and farmers were glad for it. In rejecting control and suffering

88 Idem.
the consequences, tobacco country entered the wartime economy more hierarchically organized, more corporatist, than they had ever been before. This new stage of organization, and the foreclosure of the possibility that crop control would be defeated again, enabled a crop of elite farmer-politicians to envision a global market for a cigarette harvest.
Chapter 4:  
The Imperial Vision of the Producers Republic

The Second World War was good for farmers. Forces of destruction and reconstruction spread the virtues of flue-cured tobacco to parts of the world that had never before experienced an American-style cigarette. But by 1949, the Progressive Farmer warned that the good times of the postwar era came may well come with expiration date. When “Mr. Foreign Smoker” begins to think to himself “sa-ay pal, the tobacco in this here American cigarette is no better than what we can grow right here in our country,” flue-cured tobacco growers “will begin losing their grip on one of the richest agricultural prizes in America—our world-wide flue cured tobacco market with all the profit it brings.”¹ The need to defend an international market represented a dramatic expansion of growers’ economic horizons. After all, just ten years earlier, tobacco farmers strained to keep themselves unified as small farmers revolted against perceived discriminations of the tobacco program. Tobacco corporatism ultimately prevailed—its inequities less important than its main virtues: guaranteed income and predictability. With solid support in the tobacco belt, the institutions of tobacco corporatism used the war to expand their global reach. The history of tobacco farmers’ engagement with the postwar global marketplace specifies the interconnections between regional and international shifts in political economy. Tobacco tethered local practice to global forces.

I begin the chapter by scrambling the lines of parallel historiographies. Historians of the Sunbelt have emphasized defense and research as the key industries that reconfigured the postwar southern economy; historians of postwar American culture have

¹ Progressive Farmer, April 1949, 20.
suggested that a political and cultural consensus was forged around free enterprise, choice and abundance. Tobacco was farmed at the intersection of these processes: growers tirelessly touted the qualities of their product and in so doing, changed the physical, economic and political landscape of North Carolina and its foreign country-clients. From historiography I move to the history of tobacco during the war. I position the Second World War as central to the modern tobacco economy. Like historians Meg Jacobs and Lizabeth Cohen, I focus on the pivotal role played by the Office of Price Administration (OPA); but my argument is that opposition to the OPA forged a powerful tobacco nexus—one that was not anti-consumption, but anti-consumerism. The OPA’s price ceiling on tobacco leaf drew farmers into closer alliance with warehousemen and manufacturers, who were also ill-disposed toward the agency. At the same time, the price ceiling exacerbated the labor shortage felt acutely on the farm. Despite a labor shortage, the Second World War tremendously enriched tobacco farmers. All over the world, more people were smoking more cigarettes than ever before. This was because the United States, as the main architect of global economic institutions, was in the position to be the tobacconist to the world. I then turn to the two grower-run, state-supported institutions that globalized the tobacco program. The Flue-Cured Tobacco Stabilization Cooperative Corporation (known simply as “Stabilization”) and Tobacco Associates (TA) illustrated the corporatism of agricultural policy administration, the privileged position of producers directing global trade flows, and the utility of the agrarian myth in legitimating growers’ policymaking privilege.

I. The Flue-Cured Sunbelt
Beginning with the election of 1936, accelerated by Roosevelt’s failed “court packing” attempt in 1937, and, finally, sealed with the conversation to wartime production, the jagged reforms of the New Deal-era gave way to smooth, Keynesian consumerism. As southern leaders and federal officials revved the homefront war machine they chiseled away at the region’s dubious reputation as the “Nation’s No.1. economic problem.” Growth-oriented whigs—mostly Democrats, but, occasionally after 1954, Republicans too—capitalized on a brutal facet of southern distinctiveness: a poorly-paid, un-unionized labor force. The modern south was built by business progressives on a federally funded scaffolding of research, infrastructure and defense. These sectors, in turn, came to dominate the geographies less and less given to agriculture. In his seminal *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, Bruce Schulman contends that the federal government was no less present in the south for having scuttled ambitious plans for social reform in favor of economic growth. The Sunbelt was less obviously racist than the cotton belt, but it was similarly inhumane, reflecting an emphasis on “regional development rather than human development.”

Schulman’s top-down analysis of federal intervention in the region spawned a number of illuminating studies on the role of private citizen interest groups in policing the racial boundaries of southern spaces. New urban historians focused not on the disappearance of the cotton belt, but on the emergence of the Sunbelt’s most

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geographically distinctive and politically dynamic feature: the suburbs. Drawing upon a language of “color-blind,” free-choice individualism, grassroots organizations maintained residential and educational segregation through a “politics of suburban secession.”⁴ Most recently, scholars have pointed toward the packaging, promotion and selling of southern distinctiveness itself as the latest, most self-referential feature of Sunbelt politics, reinserting the role of myth in southern political history.⁵

This spatial turn in southern history has emphasized the redistribution of electoral, demographic and economic power from the country to the city. Agricultural historians who have lamented the demographic hollowing-out of rural worlds have also abided by the same premise as the new suburban historians. With census figures, electoral results, and district maps, scholars have shown that demographic transformations—the exodus from cotton culture that followed capital-intensive, mechanized agricultural production—altered the south’s physical and political landscape.⁶ Nevertheless, the analytical stance assumed by urban and agricultural historians has tended to obscure the dynamism within the fields themselves, while also suggesting that changes in southern (and national) political economy are largely explained by demography. The wartime and postwar

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⁴ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006); Matthew Lassiter and Kevin Kruse, “The Bulldozer Revolution: Suburbs and Southern History Since World War II,” *Journal of Southern History* (August 2009): 691-706. I have yet to come across a single black man or woman featured in North Carolina Grange or Farm Bureau publications. The USDA was a notorious bastion of racism, in ways that are only beginning to be redressed legally. The *Pigford II* class action, settled only in 2010, was the largest civil rights settlement to-date. In 2010, Congress authorized 4.6 billion dollars to settle the suit with African American and Native American farmers unfairly denied USDA farm loans and assistance.


history of tobacco complicates this picture. Frozen physically by acreage restriction, neither mechanized nor capital-intensive, postwar tobacco cultivation nevertheless fit seamlessly into the Sunbelt. The crop bore the economic imprimatur of other Sunbelt spaces: it was heavily subsidized by a federal government denounced at times, and courted at others. Tobacco country was no less part of the Sunbelt for having remained agricultural.

If the postwar south had a new geography in cities and suburbs, it had a new political sensibility in the “citizen-consumer.” The suburban “landscape of mass consumption” was anchored in a new vision of economic citizenship. Just as the newest New South suggested that the region’s racial problems could be “solved” by economic prosperity, the ethos of the “consumers’ republic” suggested to Americans that they could “simultaneously [fulfill] personal desire and civic obligation by consuming.” This shift in civic identity was anchored in interlocking levels of economic ideology, government policy and popular practice. At the ideological level, John Maynard Keynes’ theory of counter-cyclic “pump-priming” to achieve full employment and mass purchasing power formed a new consensus at the center of American political thought. The policies that radiated from this core consensus created the American middle-class. Through liberal extension of consumer credit, the G.I. Bill, an array of local and federal housing

8 Ibid., 119.
subsidies, the federal government literally invested in the development of citizen-consumers. Lizabeth Cohen, Meg Jacobs and Alice Kessler Harris root this new political ideology not only in top-down interventions, but also in diffuse spatial-economic changes: an increase in paid work, the swelling of the cities and the splattering of suburbs, and increasingly important role of home ownership.

This new ethos swung around the fulcrum of the Second World War as the “ideology of economic citizenship based on participation in the mass consumer economy” replaced nineteenth century producerism as “the foundation of American civic identity.” Where, in the historiography, does that leave actual producers? Though Cohen and Jacobs have masterfully elaborated the politics of American plenty, one still gets the sense that in the postwar period all food and fiber grew in cellophane on store racks; that citizen consumers were uniquely conversant in the language of abundance; and that consumption existed independently of the politics of production. My argument does not supplant, but rather supplements the strongest claims of Sunbelt and consumption literatures. Producers, too, made the Consumers’ Republic. But tobacco farmers did their suburban and city-dwelling cousins one better by actively lobbying and exporting the goods themselves—as well as the ethos of consumption that perpetuated demand for their crop. Lizabeth Cohen has argued that applying the Cold War lens to the postwar era has concealed important homefront developments. True enough, but Cohen’s national-scale domestic focus also obscures the titanic global shifts that rumbled the plow and the pocketbook of producer and consumer. By following farmers and their institutions on a smaller, regional scale we can see the regional, national and global economies intersect and refract. The shiny packaging of the Consumers’ Republic should not blind us to how
wartime transformations made a producers’ market. Strong consumer demand sustained by government policy, Cold War ideology and rising expectations for living standards gave farmers the kind of market leverage that had long eluded them. Tobacconen were not war profiteers; they were war kings. Not only were growers producing now for a richer, more heavily-smoking domestic market, but the war had brought new subjects into the flue-cured empire while also giving lessons to growers in the art of administration.

II. The Homefront when Lucky Strikes Went to War

The war was a major disruption to the way tobacco farmers, companies and smokers all over the world did business. During the interwar period, about fifty percent of leaf sold at auction was exported, and the vast majority of it was bound for the United Kingdom. This Anglo-American “special relationship” was risky. Growers knew England to be a special customer, and were justifiably nervous when the outbreak of war in Europe sent British buyers back across the Atlantic. After a series of meetings between local political leaders, interest group officials and tobacco administrators, the government-run Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) stepped in to mend this substantial marketing breech. The CCC, a body created to purchase and hold tobacco that failed to meet the government support price on the auction floor, purchased the British share of tobacco, abating the wave of panic that had rippled across the tobacco belt. Though quickly resolved, this small drama foreshadowed themes that persisted for the

rest of the war: a foreign market in abeyance; government intervention to maintain the shape of the tobacco program; and an ever-greater coordination of local organizational resources and bureaucracies.\textsuperscript{11}

Even before the United States entered the conflict, farmers were keenly aware of the international demand for flue-cured, and the importance of international politics in establishing the market. Like thousands of southern farmers before them, tobacco growers generally espoused a vague free-trade internationalism—a twentieth century update on the sentiment that the Civil War was fought over the north’s preference for a high tariff. The idea had basis in material reality: southern tobacco farmers, like nineteenth century cotton growers, produced an exportable surplus, and were therefore hurt by the protectionist walls that were beneficial to midwestern farmers and manufacturing interests in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{12} As a European war became more apparent, tobacco leaderships’ advocacy of free trade assumed a moralizing tone that would have been familiar to nineteenth century Manchester industrialists, or to Wilsonians a generation earlier. Clarence Poe used his editorial position in the \textit{Progressive Farmer} to grandstand against war. Citing Isaiah—“and nation shall not lift up sword against nation”—before turning toward more earthly concerns, Poe beseeched “southern congressmen” to become more worthy heirs to Woodrow Wilson. “The South’s economic prosperity requires peaceful and prosperous foreign nations to provide markets for our cotton, tobacco, and other export products,” Poe wrote. “A chief reason cotton and other farm products are now so low is that foreign nations are spending so many billions for

useless armaments that there is not enough money left to buy the wholesome products of American farms and factories.”

Tobacco leadership reiterated these arguments four years later, when growers opened world markets in the name of fighting communism by raising global standards of living.

Poe’s prediction of war-induced ruin was wrong, though. The conflict made farmers wealthier than they had ever been, and also raised their power within the industry. After their temporary and disastrous repudiation of crop control in 1939, growers were wedded to strict supply management despite the siren song of surging consumer demand. The result was expensive leaf and market leverage. Economists point toward war and rising incomes as stimulants to domestic cigarette demand, but longer term trends were also converging to produce more smokers: a growing population and a rise in the number of city dwellers likelier to favor cigarettes than their dip-loving, pipe-smoking country cousins. Finally, the women who had been pioneer smokers in the 1920s were now mothers. In the words of one economist, the pioneer smokers of the 1920s, had, by the 1940s, “time to influence the tastes of its offspring—a plain case of a trend begetting a trend.”

On the homefront, smoking was popular and even patriotic, as cigarette advertisements ingeniously touted their industry’s contribution to war.

But the only smoke billowing abroad was from gunpowder. Flue-cured tobacco temporarily lost its export market during the war, but provided growers with the rare opportunity to profit from scarcity: as cigarettes dwindled, their economic value and cultural cachet grew. Reports of British civilian scarcity trickled into the American press.

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In a salubrious show of sacrifice, the King of England was reported by the Queen to “have cut down his smoking because of the shortage.” It was suggested that the City of London deal with the problem simply by banning British women from purchasing a pack. Retailers were reportedly frustrated at the “many idle women” who went from shop to shop to stockpile quantities of cigarettes as rumors of a shortage swirled. Meanwhile, the United States government, through the Lend-Lease program, loaned Britain money with which to purchase American-manufactured goods like cigarettes, thereby keeping the British palate, and the excise-dependent British purse, accustomed to the taste of flue-cured.

As it did with so many goods, the United Kingdom served as the prewar artery of the flue-cured tobacco empire. North Carolina-grown cigarette tobacco exported to London may have ended up as ashes in India or tar in the lungs of a Canadian. But with formal trade routes snuffed out by European hostilities, the war itself dispersed the weed. The proliferation of American and British soldiers’ rations on the continent gave Europeans a taste of the brands that would become abundant after the war. During the interwar period, flue-cured tobacco was not popular on the continent, where smokers enjoyed cigarettes rolled with “dark,” Turkish tobacco. These were grown and consumed in the same country, or were imported from Turkey or Greece. Allied soldiers introduced Europeans to flue-cured tobacco, unwittingly tethering the preferences of German

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16 “Consider Ban on Cigaret Sales to London Women,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 11 June 1941, 12.
consumers to the economic fates of North Carolina tobacco growers. Germans became fast and grateful subjects of the flue-cured empire. Just four years after the war ended, one informal survey conducted by a German cigarette manufacturer suggested that between 85 and 90 percent of Germans preferred the taste of flue-cured over the oriental tobacco they had long smoked.  

Shortages hit the United States later, but many Americans still felt they had to wait “a long time between smokes.” Cigarette scarcity started, in part, on the farm, not in scarcity of fertilizer, material or labor, but in the domestic allotment system itself, which curbed the number of acres a grower could cultivate without penalty. Tobacco farmers under-planted their allotments in 1941 because prices of other crops were advancing faster than those of tobacco. In 1941, growers planted the smallest number of acres since 1934. With domestic demand up, and with the government purchasing leaf on behalf of the British, tobacco reserves held by both private companies and the CCC dwindled, pushing tobacco well prices above the support price, where it remained for the duration of war. This meant that the Commodity Credit Corporation never acted as a buyer of last resort on the auction floor. Any tobacco put on the floor was snapped up by private companies just as quick as the auctioneer could get out his chant.

What was happening at auction had implications both on the farm at the tobacconists’ store. Growers were at the heart of a crop-controlled sellers market, giving them an incentive to farm more intensively, wringing every bit of productivity from their allotted earth. Between 1940 and 1954, there were 5,400 fewer acres planted in tobacco, 

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19 For more on the extraordinary growth and popularity of flue-cured tobacco in Germany, see Hines, “Recent Trends and Developments, 386-388. See Appendix, Figure 4.2 and 4.3.
21 Benedict and Stine, Agricultural Commodity Programs, 70. The CCC continued to make purchases for the British loan, program, though.
but production increased over that same period by 1.2 million pounds.\textsuperscript{22} Despite a contraction in the export market and the number of available brands, the industry was warproof. Domestic and military demand more than compensated for export loss.\textsuperscript{23} When auction markets opened in July 1943, the price of tobacco exceeded OPA-mandated ceiling prices. A 41-cent price maximum was set by the OPA in 1942, but some pounds of flue-cured leaf reportedly sold as high as 60 cents. Since price ceilings were applied to the total average prices paid by a single buyer at auction, buyers could compensate for their splurges with purchases of cheaper, lower quality leaf to bring their average under the ceiling. But even low quality leaf was selling at inflated cost. An extension service specialist noted that the same kind of leaf that sold in 1942 for 3 or 4 cents, brought in 1943 25 to 38 cents.\textsuperscript{24}

Smokers did not seem to notice a difference in what was inside the cigarette, but they did notice the lines outside the retailers’ doors. At first the signs of shortage were subtle: tobacco companies quietly retired less popular brands from the shelves in order to “devote more facilities to the manufacture” of more popular brands.\textsuperscript{25} This redounded to the long term benefit of flue-cured growers, as dead brands “which father smoked back in the days of shaving mugs and handlebar mustaches” were predominantly of Turkish-type tobacco. Then, inter-bureaucratic squabbling between the Food Distribution Administration and the Commerce Department gave Americans an inkling of looming supply hiccups. Commerce Department issued a statement that “a shortage looms in


\textsuperscript{23}“Georgia Farmers Face a Good Tobacco Market,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, 12 July 1942, 2D.

\textsuperscript{24}“Tobacco Prices Above Ceiling at Opening of Auction Sales,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, 28 July 1943, 3.

cigarette supplies,” while the more sanguine FDA retorted that “we do not see any difficulty in meeting US civilian demands for cigarettes in anything like the visible future.”

Tobacco buyers, farmers, and extension specialists were more prescient than the face-saving Food Distribution Administration, which may have been trying to deflect scrutiny from its diversion of civilian cigarette supplies to the military. Signs of problems for consumers looked like quite the opposite to farmers. A USDA report issued in late 1941 predicted a “considerably improved” outlook for 1942. Although “normal commercial exports decreased last year to the lowest levels since the 1860s,” Lend-Lease shipments of tobacco held by the Commodity Credit Corporation chipped away at reserve stocks. Meanwhile the market position of flue-cured growers improved “because of increases in domestic cigarette consumption and declines in production due to marketing quotas, developments which will continue in 1942.”

With acreage down and demand up, some growers feared that numerous farmers might be tempted toward ruinous overproduction, which would undermine farmers’ newfound position of power within the supply chain. “Many farmers are planning to overplant,” one South Carolina grower warned readers of the Progressive Farmer. “In the interest of common good, we need rigid control more than ever.” Farmers were afraid of their own productive capacities, for behind every high price lurked the potential to “ruin ourselves” through “an excessive crop.”

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26 “FDA Disagrees with Commerce Department on Cigarette Shortage,” Wall Street Journal, 16 October 1943.
change, but neither did the 1943 tobacco quota.\textsuperscript{29} The combination of acreage restriction and good prices lead, predictably, to more intensive cultivation. Still, higher yields were not sufficient to offset both the clamoring demand for cigarettes, and the requirements of Lend-Lease. Lest Allies “run out of American tobacco, lose their tastes for it, and thus deprive it of potential post-war markets,” domestic manufacturers were restricted in their purchases of leaf beginning in 1943. Even before the war was over, tobacco officials recognized the tremendous opportunity the conflict posed for educating the tastes of the world toward a preference for flue-cured. This was a long-term strategy, a kind of holding pattern until bright leaf tobacco could resume its imperial conquest during peacetime. Tobacco growers did not balk at domestic purchasing restrictions because their tobacco sold either way. American smokers, on the other hand, began to have cravings. Between 1943 and 1946, R.J. Reynolds rationed its popular Camel brand, creating, in the words of one industry observer, “a virtual world famine for tobacco” in 1943.\textsuperscript{30} “Famine” may have been kind of hyperbole favored by industry stakeholders or nicotine addicts. In reality smokers were limited at the point of consumption to “a single pack at a time in most instances.”\textsuperscript{31} A poll conducted by George Gallup in December 1944 suggested that the cigarette shortage affected approximately 40 percent of American civilians over age 21.\textsuperscript{32}

The “crisis” reached such proportions that the Senate War Investigating Committee launched an inquiry to determine the cause of the shortage. Sensing the

\textsuperscript{31} Idem.
\textsuperscript{32} “Gallup Poll: Cigarette Shortage Hits 40 Per Cent of People,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, 22 December 1944, 7.
opportunity to exploit public anger, S. Clay Williams, chair of R.J. Reynolds, took the opportunity to blame the domestic allotment system.\textsuperscript{33} However, the War Food Administration and AAA were quick to point out that civilian shortages had an easy explanation in heavy military consumption and clogged “pipelines of supply to the fighting fronts.” As a result of the Senate inquiry, tobacco allotments were increased by seven per cent for the 1945 harvest season, suggesting that the USDA projected a continued rise in demand.\textsuperscript{34}

Why had flue-cured production been curtailed in the midst of scarcity? The answer to this question reveals the relationship between domestic and foreign policy—a relationship felt acutely, and spoken about articulately, on the farm. Shortages were not, as in the words of Richard Kluger’s Pulitzer prize-winning account, “inevitable.”\textsuperscript{35} They were a result of government decision-making and farmer support. It resulted, on the one hand, from, “too many smokers;” on the other, tobacco was scarce because of a war-driven prioritization of food-growing acres over those allotted to tobacco. Farmers were told that “food will win the war,” that their crop rows were the first trenches in the war effort. Veteran agricultural planner Howard Tolley’s 1943 agrarian rhapsody, \textit{The Farmer Citizen at War}, argued that “farmers…must physically energize the war…produc[ing] an abundance of food to ensure stamina for three shifts at furnace and lathe and for our campaigns across the sea.”\textsuperscript{36} Even more, though, farmers had to “furnish vast quantities of food for our allies in accordance with lease-lend commitments that have

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Tolley1943} Tolley served first as the director of Farm Management for the BAE in the 1920s and then later as a planner in the AAA.
\end{thebibliography}
already involved two and a quarter billion dollars.” More than just patriotism, the cause of world peace demanded that American farmers conjure “the largest production ever known.” And so tobacco acres were set so as to incentivize adequate production of a humbler, but more nutritious crop. “Uncle Sam needs five million acres of peanuts,” urged one USDA circular. Peanuts, “well suited to the coastal plains of the Southern states,” were frequently grown in tandem with tobacco. “The lowly peanut—the ‘ground pea’ of the South—has become an international hero, for peanuts produce more oil per acre than any of our major crops.” Instead of considering their price support quota, the Progressive Farmer encouraged farms to “insure…meeting [their] ‘food for freedom’ quota.” In wartime, farmers could not simply rely on “old ‘regulars’ like cotton and tobacco,” but instead must call in the reinforcements in “this food war” such as soybeans and grass for pasture. A broad vision of national wartime needs, and not the USDA’s miscalculation of cigarette demand in determining tobacco allotments, engineered the shortfall. For this reason, manufacturers’ attempts to undermine the allotment system fell flat. But during the war, farmers and industry were drawn closer together by their mutual hatred of another institution of government planning: the Office of Price Administration.

III. The OPA’s Producer Problem

Historians of postwar consumption point to the Office of Price Administration (OPA) as a catalytic agent in the creation of economic citizenship. Created in May

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38 Ibid., 33-34.
1941, and strengthened through subsequent legislation in 1942 and 1943, the OPA set rationing limits and authorized price and wage ceilings in order to control wartime inflation. Meg Jacobs has argued that, “with its advocacy of cheap prices and equitably distributed goods, OPA represented a consumer agency par excellence.” Injecting public power into private transactions, the government “looked over [consumers’] shoulders as it never had before.” The OPA was a point of contact for regular Americans and government, encouraging popular participation, economic self-advocacy, and the emergence of a broad-based identity of consumers as “one big group of underrepresented citizens.” Unable to overcome the opposition of the meatpackers, OPA was ultimately abandoned by consumers as ineffectual at putting meat on the table. Nevertheless, the agency fomented a purchasing power agenda that centered postwar political economy. The OPA’s demise has been laid at the feet of powerful business groups like the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Dry Goods Association, and the US Chamber of Commerce. These groups, along with a mere auxiliary flank of farm bloc politicians who “embraced [industry’s] sense of lawlessness and frustration” with the OPA, torpedoed the agency’s Congressional reauthorization in 1946.

In emphasizing that consumers’ ultimately came to “abandon OPA as ineffectual” or that the forces behind price control were portrayed as “weak, dependent and feminine,” Cohen and Jacobs perhaps give rather too much emphasis to the consumers’ reception of government policy—as if laws themselves were just goods to be adjudicated

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41 Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic, 65.
43 Ibid., See also Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic, and Jacobs, Pocketbook Politics.
44 Jacobs has emphasized the central role of the meat packers, particularly their purposeful disruption of meat supply, in undermining public support for OPA. Jacobs, “How About Some Meat?” 933.
on the basis of citizen-consumer satisfaction. Producers’ power, outsized in Congress, almost egregiously so until the 1962 Supreme Court decision *Baker v. Carr*, undergirded the abundance that consumers came to demand. To draw out the distinctive producerist politics practiced by tobacco growers during the war and the postwar eras is not to downplay Jacobs’ and Cohen’s claims about the centrality of consumption to American capitalism. Rather, to highlight midcentury farm power enriches our understanding of the global scope and individual depth of the consumerist ethos. Tobacco farmers marshaled the language of consumption, while tobacco consumers—smokers—practiced a habit priced and regulated with producers in mind. To fully understand the Consumers’ Republic we have to ask how producers made it.

It’s important to emphasize that farmers and price planners were cut from the same Keynesian cloth. Neither group opposed government organization of the economy. Indeed, both groups appealed to the wartime emergency as necessitating further government involvement. Farmers just wanted government policy to benefit them more. Far from a free enterprise crusade, farmers built their argument against the Office of Price Administration around the fact that the planners had improperly calculated agriculture’s rightful share of the pie. Many Keynesians who “formed the key macroeconomic advisory group in the Office of Price Administration,” were, like John Kenneth Galbraith, agricultural planners. Tobacco growers in particular shared Keynesian planners’ belief that the American economy should be structured around the principle of abundance, and that government policy should stimulate consumption. Aside

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from a general acceptance that the government should prime demand, both farmers and
OPA administrators shared a preoccupation with postwar planning. Though here, as we
shall see, their visions of government policy were starkly at odds.

Agricultural commodities had initially been exempted from price ceilings, but
when the OPA order to cap the maximum price tobacco could fetch came in September
1942, growers were incensed. The government, farmers insisted, did not understand the
internal dynamics of tobacco production. A price ceiling on tobacco compounded
farmers’ very tight labor situation. With memories of the price collapse after the first
world war, farmers were reluctant to relinquish control of bureaucratic prerogatives they
had come to regard as rightfully their own. They took special exception to the fact that
the OPA order was given without soliciting grower input, suggesting that growers
expected a privileged place in the formulation of commodity policy—even if that policy
had greater breadth of vision than securing tobacco farm income. The OPA reasoned that
flue-cured tobacco needed price controls because “tobacco represents 80% of
the…(factory cost) of producing popular priced cigarettes,” and because “OPA has
exerted rigid price control over the price of cigarettes.” The directive explaining the
rationale for control noted that 1942 tobacco prices stood at 235% of their 1940 average,
whereas farm wages were only 183% of their 1940 rates.47 Disentangling the relationship
between prices and wages was more difficult than the OPA suggested because most
tobacco harvesting was done by family labor, not hired hands. When a ceiling price was
fixed, so was a farm family’s income. Tobacco farmers, though more tied to family work

47 “Memorandum: Record on 1943 Crop of Flue-Cured Tobacco,” 15 July 1943, Folder:“Tobacco
1941,1942,1943,” Box 3701, Record Group 188 (hereafter cited RG188), Records of the Office of
Price Administration (hereafter OPA Records) National Archives and Records Administration II
(NARA-II), College Park, Maryland.

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than other crop producers, were representative of farmers more generally in their antipathy for OPA. Even within the highest levels of government, OPA administrators and officials in the Department of Agriculture, right up to Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, sparred over the government’s right to tamp down on farm prices. Former AAA Tobacco Section Director and then-CCC administrator Jack Hutson recalled that Leon Henderson, chair of the OPA, and Claude Wickard had such an acrimonious relationship that Fred Vinson and James Byrnes were called in to referee the “quarrels between those two agencies.”

Tensions were even higher between OPA officials and tobaccomen. John Kenneth Galbraith reported to his superior, Leon Henderson, that the situation between the two groups had become “explosive.” In late 1942, representatives from tobacco-growing states met with Galbraith to discuss ceiling levels for the subsequent year. Members of Congress from Virginia, South Carolina and North Carolina complained that growers had not been consulted in establishing the 1942 levels. To Galbraith’s retort that the “meetings yesterday and today were the best possible evidence of our desire to consult with the producers,” the representatives present articulated what would become a standard rallying cry for southern farm politicians. Though he was happy to support acreage control legislation (and the bureaucratic expansion that such legislation necessarily entailed), Virginia representative John Flanagan “stated his general dislike for

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49 Galbraith, not normally associated with the rough and tumble world of farm politics, was actually uniquely qualified to negotiate with tobacco growers. Galbraith grown up in the tobacco-growing region of Ontario, and later earned his undergraduate degree in agricultural economics from Ontario Agricultural College—an institution that maintained significant ties to North Carolina tobacco, particularly North Carolina State University, for the remainder of the century.
bureaucracy.”\textsuperscript{50} Kentucky Senator Virgil Chapman gave colorful specificity to Flanagan’s claim, describing the OPA as “an aggregation of bureaucratic lice sucking the blood of the body politic and contributing to the defeat of good Democrats.”\textsuperscript{51} Down in North Carolina, the Agriculture Commissioner Kerr Scott sparred with the state’s OPA director, Theodore Johnson. The Commissioner prefaced his missive by noting that he took “no exception to price control,” and then proceeded to excoriate Johnson and newly appointed chief OPA administrator Prentiss Brown (Leon Henderson was sacked at the end of 1942 after repeated confrontations with farm state congressmen). OPA had “accentuated the great disparity between farm income and non farm income,” by freezing commodity prices without freezing wages. “Is the [farm] income where it ought to be if we want production?” Scott asked rhetorically. Despite the good prices North Carolina farmers had recently received for their crops, he harkened back to the “long lean years that agriculture has gone through and the mortgages that are still on the farms that were put on them twenty give years ago.” Conjuring visions of simple, hardworking hewers of wood, the Commissioner noted that “a farmer might not be able to figure very much, but he does know whether he has anything left.”\textsuperscript{52}

North Carolina OPA Director Theodore Johnson responded to this agrarian myth with agricultural reality. Chastising the intemperance of the Scott’s note, the OPA director pointed out that his agency served “the farmer as well as the general consuming public.” Farmers were, after all, consumers as well, and their expenditures on farm

\textsuperscript{50} Congressman Flannagan’s general dislike for bureaucracy did not prevent him from legislating stricter controls on tobacco acreage.  
\textsuperscript{51} J.K. Galbraith to Leon Henderson, Folder-“Tobacco 1941, 42, 43,” Box 3701, OPA Records, RG 188, NARA-II.  
\textsuperscript{52} W. Kerr Scott to Theodore S. Johnson, February 14, 1943, Folder-“OPA,” Box 44, North Carolina Department of Agriculture Records (hereafter NCDA), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (NCDAH).
machinery and fertilizer, in addition to everyday items, were controlled by OPA regulations. “If the general price of farm goods has been controlled to save 3.3 billion dollars to the farmer, 5.9 billion dollars to the consumers generally, and 25.8 billion dollars to the Federal Government, I think we have a right to expect the support of the farm group rather than their criticism.” Johnson took particular exception to Scott’s naked advocacy of farmers as a privileged group. “I do not believe [the farmer] has a right to classify himself as a special interest that has to be freed of all restraint,” he wrote. “I do not see how the farmer can have his cake and eat it too.”

Farmers did not see their position as economically gluttonous. Rather, they viewed the OPA as an adversarial outgrowth of a bloating bureaucracy. Farmers saw a distinction between economically helpful bureaucracies, the USDA, and the “much cussed and discussed OPA.” The former merely regulated markets that farmers could not control by themselves. Viewing themselves as inherently disempowered vis-à-vis industry, farmers needed and welcomed government intervention that gave them a modicum of control in the marketplace. OPA, on the other hand, was premised on a broader economic vision—one that sought to balance national wartime needs with the demands of producers and consumers. This vision did not privilege farmers, and farmers felt the sting of government rebuke. As Jacobs and Cohen have pointed out, the OPA put consumers at the center of American political economy. And so, consumers, seemingly the new pets of an expanding, intrusive state, became an enemy of sorts for tobacco growers. Despite the protestations of the North Carolina OPA administrator, tobacco farmers did have it both ways. Though OPA controls were in effect for the remainder of

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53 Theodore S. Johnson to W. Kerr Scott, 15 February 1943, Folder-“OPA,” Box 44, NCDA, NCDAH.
the war, they rose from 38.4 cents in 1942 to 43.6 cents in 1945. Farmers pocketed more money, but maintained their sense of grievance.\textsuperscript{54}

IV. The Growing Culture of Umbrage

The problem was labor. Other staple commodities like sugar, rice, wheat and corn had experienced a mechanical and chemical revolution that was facilitated by the New Deal’s looser credit policies and virtual mandate to mechanize through landlord rental and benefit payments. Tobacco, by contrast, was still cultivated largely by hand because a suitable mechanical harvester would not be invented until the late 1950s. Well into the 1960s, agricultural economists and engineers at North Carolina State University continued to be vexed by the crop’s apparent resistance to mechanization and the costliness of harvest labor. Until then, tobacco farmers faced perpetual labor shortages. And during the war, labor was particularly short and expensive.

For tobacco farmers, the problem of labor was a problem of wages. People could not get paid enough to do the work of tobacco transplanting, suckering, harvesting and curing. Many farm boys left the farm for military service, and many women farmers left the farm for higher war wages in town. “We are beginning to scrape the bottom of the barrel,” wrote one farm expert regarding the labor forecast for 1943. The USDA recommended six untapped sources of farm labor. Their debility and distance from the farm suggested the seriousness of the shortage. Without commentary suggesting how to recruit them, the USDA recommended: “farm boys of working age,” “older men and persons physically handicapped,” “women workers…to replace farm women who will

migrate to town jobs,” “non-agricultural workers who live on farms,” “children under 14” and “town and city residents.”

OPA ceiling prices contributed to the farmers’ sense that they were being asked to shoulder more than their fair share of the wartime burden. Shortly after the price ceiling was announced, one grower wrote in exasperation to Congressman Graham Barden, who represented a district in the southeastern part of the state. Growers like himself were “in a sullen mood” at being “deprive[d] of a true market price by a ceiling.” The grower explained that, “the grower has had to cope with the high price of labor paid on construction jobs and in the War Industries.” Though he was “willing to sacrifice to win this War,” he could not understand why…the whole tobacco belt…should be penalized this way.”

Agriculture, war industries and the armed services were in a three-way battle over manpower. With a freeze on prices and no obvious routes toward social mobility, farm interests were losing. This is why tobacco farmers objected so strenuously to OPA ceiling prices on tobacco. According to Caldwell, the price ceiling would “freeze the income of people who remain on the farm” just as government was able to lure people for “war work at much higher prices.” Other farm voices insisted that government price policy favored wage workers at agriculture’s expense. The same month that the North Carolina’s farm labor commission was founded, Clarence Poe stoked this rivalry with labor in an editorial encouraging “all farmers to join one or more farm organizations.”

“Organized labor is all the time becoming more and more powerful in national and state

56 Idem.
affairs,” Poe warned. “It is imperative that the agricultural voice be as strong as that of labor.”

The war put a tremendous strain on those who remained on-farm. Out of North Carolina’s total population of 3.6 million, 362,000 men and 6,000 women entered the armed services. According to a special report conducted by rural sociologists at North Carolina State College of Agriculture, 50,000 “men and youths” left the farm during the first six months of the war. Over the next four years, the South’s rural population dropped by 3.2 million. Farmers proposed several solutions to the labor problem, and the USDA promised to help them “leave no stone unturned to assist the farmers in meeting their demands.” Tobacco, however, was not officially designated by the Department of Agriculture as an essential crop. But it was essential to the economy of North Carolina, and for that reason, the state government was attentive to tobacco growers’ demands.

State agriculture commissioner W. Kerr Scott, who later served as Governor (1949) and US Senator (1954-1958), was one of the most vocal and effective advocates for North Carolina’s tobacco growers. In 1942, Scott urged the state’s selective service board to pay careful attention to deferral appeals from farm boys. “Our farmers are patriotic, and they desire to make their contributions toward the military program,” Scott

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60 C. Horace Hamilton and Jay T. Wakeley, Some Effects of the War Upon the Farm Labor Situation in North Carolina, 1 August, 1942, Box 45, NCDA, NCDAH.
61 Idem.
62 Kerr Scott was the paterfamilias of what would become a Democratic dynasty in North Carolina. Scott’s son Bob Scott served as governor from 1969 to 1973, and his granddaughter, Meg Scott Phipps, served as agriculture commissioner between 2000 and 2003 before resigning amid allegations of charges of fraud in campaign financing. Phipps ultimately served four years in federal prison after pleading guilty to charges of fraud, conspiracy, and witness tampering.
wrote. “On the other hand, farm labor is essential if crop production goals are to be obtained.”\textsuperscript{63} Agricultural labor shortages were a diffuse problem whose solution required both farm knowledge and the coercive power of the state. As such, corporatist arrangements between private interest groups and the government gave elite tobacco farmers entrée into policymaking and emboldened them to make claims as if they were sole stakeholders in matters of agriculture. In 1943, North Carolina governor Melville Broughton appointed a Farm Labor Commission chaired by Grange Master Harry Caldwell. Broughton also invited participation from “fifty leading farmers, and representatives of various farm agencies and organization [sic].”\textsuperscript{64} Warehousemen were particularly interested in the labor situation on the farm since fewer farmers meant slower leaf flows through the auctionhouses. Facing a loss of commission fees, warehousemen aligned with tobacco farmers in fighting the government. Thus flanked, tobacco growers, their organizations and bureaucracies dug in their heels and pushed for state action on farm labor problems.

Aside from agreed-upon rules governing the harvesting and marketing of the crop, tobacco worked out the labor shortage close to the ground. Unlike the regime established by the Bracero Program, tobacco labor was not generally secured through large-scale human-movement with the state as a labor contractor. Rather, tobacco got seeded, transplanted, suckered and harvested through personalistic connections. For instance, at an early 1943 meeting of a local advisory council to the North Carolina Unemployment Compensation Commission, councilors informed the governor that they had already

\textsuperscript{63} W. Kerr Scott to The Chairman, Selective Service Board, 20 March 1942, Folder-“Commissioner’s Office,” Box 45, NCDA, NCDAH.

\textsuperscript{64} J. Melville Broughton to Gentlemen, 7 April 1943, Folder 1a, Papers of A.B. Carrington (hereafter Carrington Papers), Special Collections, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina (hereafter ECU).
taken bold initiative to contribute to the war program. Local “white and colored high school boys” could be “transported, adequately housed and utilized in the various sections of the State as the demand for them [at harvest] arises.” Not only a “much needed source of labor,” high schoolers would gain a “feeling that they are really contributing,” while avoiding delinquency that might tempt them “in view of the limitations placed on recreational facilities.”

The Governor, the United States Unemployment Service, and the Extension Service helped to facilitate the inter-state movement of these underage harvesters during the war’s duration. While high school boys may have their voluntary participation in emergency harvest work as a patriotic adventure, other sources of labor required more suasion, and, in some cases, outright coercion.

The state’s entire manpower mobilization effort operated within the “work-or-fight” proclamation that Governor Broughton issued in 1943. This order was a resuscitation of World War I-era mandatory mobilization laws, which were themselves modeled on Reconstruction-era anti-vagrancy statutes. Broughton’s work-or-fight established countywide labor boards, manned by appointees who policed their district for “loafers.” Non-working able-bodied men, “consuming the food and products of others who do labor,” were to be reported to law enforcement for questioning, arrest and trial. The Extension Service topped the command chain in scouting and recruiting “idle” labor.

65 North Carolina Unemployment Compensation Commission to Governor Broughton, 5 March 1943, Folder- “Commissioner’s Office,” Box 45, NCDA, NCDAH.
66 “Wake County,” Undated 1943, Folder- “Farm Labor Mobilization,” Box 40, Papers of Governor J. Melville Broughton (hereafter Broughton Papers), NCDAH. Though in his letter of appointment to would-be board members Broughton noted that loafing was a problem among “white and black,” letters to the governor reveal the biases of everyday North Carolinians who were
“Work-or-fight” was a paper tiger, especially for agricultural labor. Unemployment was low during the war, and when farmers couldn’t get hands to harvest it was not because they were idle. It was because farm wages were uncompetitive. Farmers blamed OPA, but if the First World War was any guide to wartime labor markets, farmers may also have been simply unwilling, not necessarily unable, to offer the kind of wages that would have kept hands on the plow. Disgruntled farmers wrote to the Governor, complaining of wages “all out of proportion” to the “true value” of labor; but these sentiments reflected class-protecting impulses of growers, not a neutral reflection of labor market supply and demand.\textsuperscript{67}

The Governor pressed upon local selective service boards to seriously consider farm needs in issuing draft deferments. In doing so, Broughton heeded the pleas like the one he received from a farmer in Lumberton, North Carolina. “We need young men,” one farmer scrawled to the governor. “If you would ask the draft boards to not call any more farm boys maybe we could get a long [sic].”\textsuperscript{68} In the south especially, Selective Service boards were dominated by the agricultural elite, and were frequently willing to grant exemptions to young men who desired to stay on farm.\textsuperscript{69} In a creative exploitation of

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encouraged to police their neighbors. In a state where vagrancy laws had been applied discriminatorily against African Americans since Reconstruction, it is unsurprising that whites saw blacks not engaged in agricultural work as both sources of labor and evidence of defiance. See Petty, “Standing Their Ground;” Cindy Hahamovitch, \textit{The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{67} For more on southern agricultural labor during war, see Hahamovitch, \textit{The Fruits of Their Labor}, 82.
\textsuperscript{68} G.C. Caulder to Governor Broughton, 22 November 1942, Folder—“Farm Labor Mobilization Commission,” Box 38, Broughton Papers, NCDAH.
\textsuperscript{69} For a full discussion of southern congressmen’s successful efforts in securing draft deferments for workers in their labor-intensive agricultural districts, see Lee J. Alson, \textit{Southern Paternalism and the American Welfare State: Economics, Politics, and Institutions in the South, 1865-1965}. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 103-107.
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manpower, Broughton also secured German prisoners-of-war from nearby camps as labor for the tobacco harvest.\footnote{B.S. Heisler, "The Other Braceros: Temporary Labor and German Prisoners of War in the United States, 1943-1946," \textit{Social Science History} 31, No.2. (2007): 239-271.}

Unlike his New Deal predecessor John Ehringhaus, Governor Broughton carved out economic space \textit{separate} from that of the federal government. Centralized bureaucracy, had, after all, contributed to the labor shortage in the first place through price-fixing. Broughton’s goal, it seems, was to harmonize tobacco interests, including those in South Carolina and Virginia, before federal authorities peeked into the labor situation. Summoning “growers, warehousemen and manufacturers” to an auditorium at the state agricultural college in Raleigh, Broughton stressed the importance of “solving most of our problems within our own state rather than depending on a solution from the national level.” With a labor shortage that extended beyond the fields and into the warehouses and tobacco processing facilities, all parts of the tobacco supply chain had to spread their scarce manpower wisely.

As they sought to solve farm labor problems, North Carolina’s agricultural elite thickened vertically, as various parts of the tobacco supply chain came closer together, and horizontally, as various state agencies and private organizations blanketed the state hoping to wring every ounce of productivity from man and land. This thick web of institutions created order and plenty out of chaos and scarcity. Broughton invited county Farm Labor Commission chairmen to name the other appointees who would sit on the boards, thus deepening the network of agricultural elites that controlled the tobacco economy. In tobacco-producing Pender County, for instance, Broughton appointed the Farm Bureau’s president as chairman of the mobilization board. This farmer, in turn,
named other Farm Bureau members to serve alongside him as they scoured the county for labor to run their own farms. Positions appointees later held testified to the board’s privilege. In Wake County, for instance, the mobilization board was chaired by L.Y. Ballentine, who later served as the state’s commissioner of agriculture. Second in command was L.T. Weeks, who would soon run Stabilization, the private cooperative through which the tobacco program was administered.

This was how tobacco country functioned best: when defending the program against perceived political and economic threats. The elites who prospered under the program settled differences quietly, if not amicably, because they believed the continuation of the program depended upon it. Even differences among interest groups that seemed so pronounced at the national level—between the conservative Farm Bureau and the most centrist Grange—were muted in the tobacco fields. Farmers were frequently members of both, while officials in both organizations worked together other on councils and appointed committees.

V. The Smoky Ruins of War

By the end of the war, the tobacco economy had never been stronger. Demand for North Carolina flue cured was booming domestically; foreign smokers were acquiring a preference for American-style cigarettes; and non-smokers the world over were finding fewer and fewer reasons to abstain. Domestic consumption increased from 1551 cigarettes per capita in 1941 to 2,027 by war’s close. In tobacco country, warehouses

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71 J.V. Whitfield to His Excellency J. Melville Broughton, 13 September 1943, Folder-“Farm Labor Mobilization Commission,” Box 38, Broughton Papers, NCDAH.
72 Daniel, Breaking the Land, 256.
buzzed with auctioneers chanting out ever-higher bid prices. Farmers, who had increased yields with heavier applications of fertilizer and use of the most productive farmland, were prospering. They were supported by a tightly organized coterie of agricultural elites, defending and expanding the tobacco program with breadth of vision and sharpness of elbow. Despite their position of power, elite tobacco growers feared a repetition of the crisis that devastated agriculture after the First World War. Or at least they professed such a fear in order to ensure high support prices, strict acreage controls, and government export assistance. In reality, tobacco was neither politically nor economically vulnerable: production control had brought prosperity to tobacco growing regions—regions represented by powerful Congressmen, like Harold Cooley, chair of the House Committee on Agriculture. The program was inexpensive to administer, and legitimated by its description as a “farmers’ democracy.” Nevertheless, tobacco growers exercised their particular genius for false peril to justify state aid in creating a global flue-cured empire.

Political theorists, social critics and historians alike have frequently described the intersection of American foreign policy and American economic policy as imperial. Critics of global capitalism from Lenin to Chomsky have contended that economic superpowers have maintained global hegemony through the informal empire of free trade. The history of cigarette tobacco’s postwar expansion suggests that the United States economic empire was maintained through both “free” and state-structured markets.

Free enterprise was a powerful legitimating concept in fighting communism. In practice, however, freedom looked a whole lot like power: the power of the United States government to create new markets abroad; the power of tobacco growers to secure a spot in America’s imperial emporium; the power of addiction in keeping new markets hooked on American flue-cured; and, most unexpectedly, the relentlessly circular power of consumption in determining productive practices.

The end of the war meant more labor for tobacco farms as men and boys returned from overseas, and women returned home from higher-paying city jobs. Once again bucking the spatial trends in agriculture, the number of tobacco farms actually increased during the war. Because of the higher priority given to food production, total number of acres harvested fell by 5,000 during the war. But revisions in laws governing the distribution of allotments enabled farmers to break off smaller bits of land for ownership. In Franklin County (NC), for instance, there were 256 more farms in 1945 than in 1940; in nearby Nash County, this trend persisted into the 1950s, when 106 more farms existed in 1954 than in 1940. That even these small operations could succeed at the very same time that agriculture elsewhere was moving in the opposite direction says a great deal about cigarette demand and the productivity gains that made small farming tenable. Most importantly, the fact that tobacco cultivation was human-scale allowed tobacco boosters to claim that federal intervention on behalf of the industry was done in the name of the small farmer—a mythological creature who came to cultivate more than the family plot. It was as if the freezing of the geographical boundary of cultivation, the populating of this space with more farm units, and the filling up of those units with more pounds of crop.

thickened tobacco into an unbreakable juggernaut. There was a human symmetry to this spatial-economic process. The web of tobacco stakeholders thickened as a result of wartime bureaucratic coordination, the monocultural importance of the crop to thousands of people, and the opportunities afforded by global postwar reconstruction.

Through its inclusion in the Marshall Plan and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and as one of the commodities covered under the Food-for-Peace Program (Public Law-480), tobacco was woven into the fabric of the postwar global economy. Corporatist institutions threaded this needle very carefully by emphasizing by their farmer-composition, and acting through state privilege. Growers were not about to walk blindly into the postwar world like it was some buzzing, chaotic auction house in the 1920s. Farmers did not just want to reestablish markets temporarily disrupted by war. They wanted new smokers who had yet to realize how much they enjoyed American-grown flue-cured tobacco. Two bodies, neither fully public nor fully private, cultivated a bumper harvest of cigarettes. Together, the Flue Cured Tobacco Stabilization Corporation and Tobacco Associates enabled growers to court their own customers, bringing farmers into the farthest-flung reaches of government. New Deal veterans J. Con Lanier and Jack Hutson pried open world markets with a potent blend of political finesse and advertising showmanship that has characterized the industry.

Growers’ international marketing strategy was an ironic outgrowth of the domestic tobacco program. First, as critics of government intervention pointed out, the farm program raised the cost of American commodities. American flue-cured tobacco was more expensive than tobacco grown in Rhodesia, Australia, Canada, particularly as these emerging markets began to flourish under the swaddling of imperial protection.
Flue-cured growers could be undersold. But, they insisted, the quality of their product could not be replicated. Because quality was central to the promotional strategy of farmers, they were, in a sense, selling themselves—or at least an image of the flue-cured tobacco grower that they were simultaneously constructing.

Secondly, the referenda schedule imposed by the 1938 Farm Act allowed growers to tax themselves to cover the costs of Tobacco Associates. Whenever they voted to ratify marketing quotas, something they never failed to do after 1940, farmers also voted to pay 10-cents per tobacco-growing acre to finance the export promotion group. This blend of public and private organization strategically positioned farmers within the industry. Government informed nearly every imaginable aspect of tobacco production—from offering low interest loans to disseminating information on what bugs might gnaw down the cash farmers received at auction. But Tobacco Associates was described as a self-funded exercise in democracy, bringing down trade barriers, while spreading enthusiasm for American consumer goods. Significantly, Tobacco Associates unified the tobacco supply chain in a way that the state, with its bureaucratic balkanization, could not. As Hutson explained on the “Farm News Roundup” radio program in 1947, “the work of [federal] agencies often are not sufficiently coordinated to meet the particular problems for a commodity.” Given an export situation complicated by global dollar shortages, patches of tariff protection, and an American-lead reconfiguration of international trade agreements, “some coordination is needed” to “bring together all available information with respect to the export situation” in order to “advise tobacco growers and the tobacco
Tobacco Associates was possible because of the inadequacy of the administrative state to expand foreign consumption. Because trade agreements were worked out to include individual goods, the American bureaucracy, which represented specific constituencies rather than products, was ill-suited to represent trade-specific demands. Postwar trade agreements that covered raw commodities enabled a privileged place for producers in export interest groups.

Beginning in 1946 the federal tobacco program was administered through the Flue Cured Tobacco Stabilization Cooperative Corporation. Known simply as “Stabilization,” this farmer-run cooperative was responsible for the physical and financial management of the program. Through non-recourse loans made by the CCC, Stabilization bought, re-dried, stored and later sold tobacco that failed to reach the support price on the auction market. Despite its dry, almost Orwellian name, Stabilization had a physical presence in Raleigh and was run by a set of familiar faces whose names had resonance in tobacco country. Stabilization’s president, who served in that capacity for 32 years, began his tenure while also chairing the Tobacco Committee of the North Carolina Farm Bureau. Stabilization exemplified the hybrid nature of the farm program. A private conduit for public money, the idea for Stabilization originated in a Farm Bureau meeting in 1946. Further illustrating the tangled lines of public and private authority, E.Y. Floyd, Extension’s tobacco specialist and former AAA state administrator, served as Stabilization’s first executive secretary.

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76 Interview with Frank Jeter, 28 April 1947, Folder 1b, Box 1, The Papers of John B. Hutson (hereafter Hutson Papers), ECU.
77 “Annual Report, 1947,” Folder:“Annual Reports 1948,” Box 21, North Carolina Farm Bureau Papers (hereafter cited as NCFB Papers), NCSU.
Many farmers may have understood Stabilization as the entity that bought the tobacco nobody else would, but the institution was more than that. It vested growers in the public perception of their product, transforming them into salesmen whose livelihoods depended on the believability of their pitch. If Stabilization accumulated too much tobacco it would threaten the integrity of the entire tobacco program. Con Lanier was not about to let that happen to a program that wrung a “golden stream of dollars from the golden crop.” With the disposal of a billion-pound leaf surplus as their goal, Hutson and Lanier visited eight countries on three continents, convincing foreign buyers that they never knew just how much they needed American leaf. The meeting of the “American century” and the “cigarette century” was, according to Lanier, the turning point in the tobacco program. The tobaccomen created not only new smokers, but new smokers who preferred the taste of US leaf. “If we hadn’t gotten that…the other countries would have increased their tobacco,” Lanier said. “While it was not as good as ours, it was tobacco all right.”

With an institutional interest now in the foreign disposal of tobacco stocks, farmers began envision global political arrangements that could make them richer. It was an easy case to make when the alternatives posed during the height of the Cold War were jingoistic economic nationalism or regimented Sovietism. As Lanier put it to a group of eastern North Carolina businessmen in 1948, “we cannot allow Western Europe to be overrun by the Soviet hordes if we expect to continue democracy in America.” Trade and aid, particularly for tobacco, were crucial weapons in this fight. “I am in favor of extending any reasonable aid to Europe…because it will provide markets for our tobacco

78 "Speech at Rocky Mount Rotary Club," 5 March 1948, Folder-“Speech Folder, Box 1, Papers of J. Con Lanier (hereafter Lanier Papers). ECU.
crop.” Lest he be accused of parochialism, Lanier closed his speech with a husky swell of consumerist internationalism. “I am in favor of this aid in order that the free nations of Europe may have a chance to recover from the destruction of war, to continue free governments and to rebuild the channels of trade and commerce and goodwill in this world.” There was a lot riding on American tobacco, indeed.

Lanier was echoing an argument made by Virginia Representative John Flannagan and Chairman Cooley when they successfully negotiated the inclusion of tobacco as an approved use for Marshall Plan (Economic Cooperation Administration) in Germany. “We certainly do think there is a great need for tobacco, especially cigarettes and smoking tobacco, to get to these stricken countries,” Flannagan told the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in November 1947. “It will help not only politically, but it will help the morale of the people.”

As politicians and military leaders worked out how to rebuild Europe, leadership in tobacco country realized that reconstruction could change their lives as well. “The most pressing matter from the standpoint of our tobacco growers,” according to Lanier, “is to devise some means of supplying the various countries with some tobacco to preserve the taste and desire for the time when the nations can pay for the tobacco.” The means devised included state policy contoured through private initiative itself underwritten by the state. Con Lanier’s recollection of tobacco’s hard-won inclusion into the ECA package illustrates how tobacconen simultaneously massaged both formal and informal channels to growers’ preferred policy outcome.

79 Congressional Record, 80th Congress 1st Session, “Emergency Foreign Aid,” 351.
80 “Speech at Rocky Mount Rotary Club,” March 5, 1948, Box 1, Folder—“Speech Folder,” Lanier Papers, ECU.
81 Hines, “Recent Trends,” 388; Lanier Oral History, Lanier Papers, ECU.
The Agriculture Committee with Harold Cooley presiding wrote [tobacco] in there, and he could get it because he was chairman of the Agriculture Committee… We got it in the bill, and it was passed. That was it. Lucius Clay didn’t interpret it that way. He said, “You are not going to get a damn cent for tobacco.”…

Then we went to the people in Washington, D.C. [ECA agricultural special liaison Dennis] Fitzgerald, I think it was, was handling the money. He and I and Jack Hutson met for lunch over there in one of the clubs. He took the position at first that all the money ought to be used to by clothing. We took the position that if you give a man either a pipe full of tobacco or a chew of tobacco after a day’s work, he will work better and produce more. He finally agreed to this. We argued to and fro for two or three hours. He finally agreed he would allocate some money first to Germany.

So, with that hold with him, we went to Germany and had them send over a delegation to buy tobacco. We had an exhibition of it in a warehouse in Wilson (NC) with the sample of tobacco. From that they picked out some tobacco and bought it. They have been buying tobacco ever since. From two or three million first sales, we now sell sixty million pounds a year.

The authorization of tobacco purchases by a currency starved-Germany stoked grower interest in an institution that would be permanently responsible for tending the export situation. Hutson, long a student of global agricultural markets, had a solution in mind. “A great deal more is involved [in reconstruction] than stopping the spread of communism or selling goods to Europe,” Hutson told the annual American Farm Bureau Federation in 1947. “We have a direct economic interest in these areas for a much longer period than the next four years.”

To sustain this interest, Hutson and a group of prominent growers and businessmen created Tobacco Associates (TA) in early 1947. Incorporated as a non-stock, non-profit in North Carolina, Tobacco Associates was designed “wholly to promote the exportation of tobacco and tobacco products” and would “use its facilities and personnel to study, expand, promote and enlarge export markets for

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Initially the funding for the activities of the new organization—salaries, overhead and substantial travel expenses—came from private channels. Records from the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, the initial organizing force behind TA, reveal that the organization’s $100,000 budget was to be raised from contributions from bankers, growers, merchants, fertilizer dealers and warehousemen. The New Deal-imposed referendum structure enabled Tobacco Associates’ permanent financing. After the initial fundraising push, tobacco leadership settled on a long-term business solution: self-assessment by the growers using the federal tobacco program’s referendum ballot. Like boosters of the farm-program, enthusiasts of check-off marketing schemes could point to farmer participation and call it agrarian democracy. How did Tobacco Associates get on the referendum ballot in the first place? A Farm Bureau member chaired the North Carolina General Assembly’s House Agriculture Committee. His bill to “enable a deduction of 10 cents an acre on flue-cured tobacco…for the purpose of promoting foreign trade” passed easily in both the general assembly and later among growers. Lawmakers in Virginia and South Carolina passed similar legislation the following year. A piece of literature promoting the founding of Tobacco Associates proclaimed that, “if flue-cured tobacco growers are to maintain their economic position they must work out their own salvation.” Interpreting the same evidence differently, one decidedly less sanguine farm economist noted that, “tobacco

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83 “Memorandum in Connection with Meeting of Producers, 17 February 1947, Folder-1, Box 1, NCFB Papers, NCSU.
84 “County Farm Bureau Presidents,” 19 February 1947, Folder-1, Box 1, NCFB Papers, NCSU.
85 “Excerpts from the Smith-Douglas Broadcast”, 17 and 18 February, Folder 1, Box 1, NCFB Papers, NCSU.
districts have written their own ticket and have always had special treatment to handle the problems concerning their industry.”

Both Stabilization and Tobacco Associates defied categorization as public or private. Their success is easier to judge than their relationship to the state. Not only did tobacco farmers avoid postwar disaster, they profited even as their best customer, the United Kingdom, smoked the spoils of her own Empire. As growers hoped, exports to Western European countries rose substantially over their prewar averages, and Europeans developed a powerful preference for American leaf. Free trips to hear the “sing-song chant of the silver-tongued auctioneer” helped to make Norwegians, Danes, Austrians, Swiss, Italian, Dutch and Japanese buyers some of the best customers in Eastern North Carolina. The growers’ real coup, however, was capturing West Germany, where flue-cured tobacco was virtually unknown before the war. American soldiers “puffing away on American made cigarettes” introduced Germans to the “qualities of flue-cured tobacco.” With Marshall funds, Germans bought “two or three million [pounds] in first sales.” By the early 1970s, Germans were purchasing nearly sixty million pounds a year. As negotiations with politicians and military leaders suggested, the tobacco program was nearly unassailable. Stabilization actually made money on CCC loans between 1946 and 1951 by reselling tobacco above its purchase price, earning the program the distinction of being “one of the most manageable and successful of the farm programs.”

87 “Excerpts from the Smith-Douglas Broadcast”, 17 and 18 February, p.3, Folder-1, Box 1, NCFB Papers, NCSU.
88 Lanier Oral History, ECU.
89 Benedict and Stine, Agricultural Commodity Programs, 78-79. See Appendix, Figure 4.4.
The transformation in the flue-cured export market through its inclusion in foreign aid packages was swift. Cooley served on the Select Committee on Economic Aid to European Countries, which recommended the program that passed as the Marshall Plan. He made sure that flue-cured tobacco was on the approved list of commodities available for purchase with ECA funds, even though American tobacco had been prohibited to import during Germany’s two years of military occupation. After the passage of the Marshall Plan in April 1948, tobacco began flowing immediately into Western Germany. There, citizens had developed a new and powerful preference to American-style cigarettes, an addiction nursed underground as a result of wartime soldiers’ rations and postwar smuggling. With ECA financing, German smokers could finally surface and inhale deeply on flue-cured tobacco. In the first three years of Marshall Plan’s operation, ECA-financed exports to West Germany, increased to 61.5 million pounds of leaf. Prior to the war, just 1% of flue-cured exports arrived in Germany, but by 1949 that country alone represented nearly 14% of total flue-cured exports.90

North Carolina’s flue-cured empire was also born within a more traditional story of imperial decline. In an effort to conserve scarce dollars, draw upon the last major productive resources of its empire, and reestablish an economic basis for the Commonwealth as a political entity, the United Kingdom entered into a neo-mercantalist agreement with Southern Rhodesia in 1947.91 Under the agreement, the British purchased 2/3 of the Rhodesian crop, as well as a larger share of its tobacco needs from elsewhere in

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90 Hine, “Recent Developments,” 388 and 384.
the empire. Thanks to booming British cigarette, demand the UK remained tobacco
country’s best customer, but its proportionate share of flue-cured exports shrank.92

As it had done seven years earlier, news of British buyers’ scrimpy buying plans
set off waves of panic across the tobacco belt. The North Carolina Grange and Farm
Bureau, as well as local trade organizations demanded that Congress fill the hole left by
the British with ECA dollars. “Growers, warehousemen and dealers from North Carolina,
South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Virignia…seek the protection of their government,”
resolved one trade association meeting to North Carolina Representative Graham Barden.
“Be it…resolved: that the Department of State, the Economic Cooperation
Administration, and other appropriate Government Departments and Agencies take
immediate and appropriate action to protect our domestic economy by providing
adequate funds to participating countries for the procurement of US tobacco in
accordance with the intent of Congress.”93 A few years later, the Progressive Farmer
highlighted this teeter-totter relationship between Western Germany and the United
Kingdom in maintaining the shape of the flue-cured export trade. Germany “will likely
pick up any losses we have in exports to the UK,” where Winston Churchill’s policy of
imperial food sufficiency forced a curtailment of tobacco imports. “The tobacco
prosperity of Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee is so closely tied
with world affairs that even elections in foreign countries can affect the size of future
crops,” Progressive Farmer explained to readers. Fortunately for growers, domestic

92 Speech at the Bright Belt Warehouse Association, June 6, 1949, Folder-“D-Articles and Talks,”
Box 1, Hutson Papers, ECU.
93 “Resolution of representatives of flue-cured, Burley, fire-cured and dark air-cured tobacco
growers,” 30 August 1948, Folder 251, Box 42, The Papers of Congressman Graham Barden
(hereafter Barden Papers), Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University,
Durham, North Carolina (Duke).
policies the world were cigarette-dependent as “tobacco as a revenue producer to run the government” meant that England “will still afford a good market…in the years ahead.”

Thus flue-cured was a deeply global, local commodity—a regionally-specific prism through which observers could see the waning of one empire and the emergence of a new international economic order premised on the reduction of trade barriers.

The development of a robust export market became its own justification for further policy intervention. When exports threatened to flag, a new tariff wall was erected, or a new treaty was up for negotiation, tobacco interests pushed hard for the special treatment of their commodity on the grounds that “no other group of producers of an important agricultural commodity has a larger stake in sound conditions in foreign counties than the producers of flue-cured tobacco.”

In 1951, German officials had grown unwilling to spend ECA dollars on American tobacco leaf. In response, Cooley, in his position as Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture, appointed a committee comprised of Senators and Congressmen from other tobacco-growing states to “investigate dwindling exports of American tobacco under the ECA.” As a result of these committee conferences, Cooley was joined by representatives from the USDA and the ECA on a 3-man trade mission to Germany in May, 1951. This trade mission successfully resuscitated the flagging German market, and also established a precedent for trade expansion in other dollar-short countries. German purchases of American leaf were increasingly financed by private barter transactions, thereby affording greater negotiating leeway for private trade associations, like Tobacco Associates, to conduct

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95 “Tobacco Exports-For NC Papers,” 5 March 1950, Folder-“D, Articles and Talks,” Box 1, Hutson Papers, ECU.
96 “Cooley Announces Appointment of Tobacco Committee,” 28 April 1951, Folder 1359, Box 13, Cooley Papers, SHC.
foreign policy. Hutson consulted with the State Department on tobacco’s inclusion in the multilateral General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) agreements and on the Public Law-480 (PL-480), also known as the “food-for-peace” program.\footnote{“Statement of the General Review and Renegotiation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade,” 16 September 1954, Record Group 54 (RG54), Records of the Department of State, NARA-II.} Both Lanier and Hutson testified frequently in front of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee, the two committees responsible for crafting postwar trade policy, to press tobacco interests into export legislation.\footnote{“Speech-Tobacco Association of the United States,” 16 June 1955, Folder-“f-Articles and Talks,” Box 1, Hutson Papers, ECU.} Supported by general farm organizations whose platforms routinely included nods to the lowering of trade barriers in the name of fighting communism, the individuals and institutions that ran the *federally subsidized* domestic tobacco program became spokesmen for free trade.\footnote{See, for instance, the North Carolina Farm Bureau’s position that “We support all legislative and administrative measures that will increase the flow of goods and service between free nations...We further favor the establishment of such private and public agencies as may be necessary to promote and encourage a high level of trade between the free countries of the world.” “Resolutions Adopted at the 17\textsuperscript{th} Annual Convention,” Folder 2, Box 16, NCFB Papers, NCSU.} Through these international programs, a “sizable quantity” of American flue-cured tobacco was promoted and exported into a Japan, Egypt, Uruguay, Spain and Italy, among other nations.\footnote{Tobacco Associates, “Annual Report,” 1960, p.2 Tobacco Associates Incorporated.[Annual Report] March 1, 1960. Tobacco Institute. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/ror59b00.} Though not an impartial observer, Cooley estimated that “farmers receive perhaps 100 times the amount [Tobacco Associates] costs them” as the 10-cent self-assessment on the *federal* tobacco referendum.\footnote{Press Release, 17 July 1952, Folder 1554, Box 36, Cooley Papers, SHC.} Thus commodity corporatism not only organized the operation of the domestic tobacco program, but it also directed global consumption. Tobacco Associates operated less by applying direct pressure on tobacco Congressmen, than from a position of consensus. A government tobacco delegation that
conducted trade missions in an attempt to shore up more business for Tobacco Associates and tobacco growers was not ripe for “capture” by tobacco interests; they were grown in the same field.

Behind these concrete policy achievements, tobacco interest groups developed a commitment to the ideology of free trade. What did this mean to them, specifically? Because virtually no tobacco was imported into the United States, and because the only competitors for global flue-cured dominance were “falsely” benefitted by imperial protection, “free trade” meant the right of importing nations to lower their imports and customs duties on American leaf. Hutson, in his capacity as President of Tobacco Associates, argued on behalf of unfettered tobacco flow in front of professional associations, farm interest groups and government officials throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. He argued that, “we must import some products if we expect to export other products,” giving tobacco country a simple, powerfully materialist argument in support of free trade that would also “build up other parts of the free world.”

Producer lobbies that ran the agricultural welfare state cheered the postwar global orientation toward freer trade across the Atlantic. Tobacco growers’ economic interest made them a ready constituency for a free-trade political coalition that moved in tandem with, and also extended beyond, the free-enterprise ethos undergirding the Sunbelt economy.

This was what a producers’ republic looked like: strenuous advocacy for the right of everyone everywhere to consume their products. In tobacco country there was no tension between the idea of “free trade” and the commodity’s subsidy and promotion by the government—just as Sunbelt politicians and suburbanites saw no contradiction

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102 “Talk at the Foreign Agricultural Service Club-USDA,” 5 June 1955, Folder-“e-Articles and Talks,” Box 1, Hutson Papers, ECU.
between their advocacy of property rights, associational choice, and local control and the federal policies that made their radical individualism possible. The rural Sunbelt was similarly imbued with a deeply held belief in its entitlement to federal largess, while at the same time denying the legitimacy of governmental protection for other sectors or countries.
PART III:

DEFENSE
Chapter 5:
The Benefit of the Doubt: Agriculture’s Tobacco Science

In 1955, W. Kerr Scott, the pipe-smoking farmer-senator from North Carolina, asked President Eisenhower to authorize an “expanded research program in tobacco.” Scott was an affable man, affectionately dubbed the “Squire of the Haw River”—a reference to his agrarian roots in Alamance County, the heart of the “old” tobacco belt in the North Carolina piedmont. His argument on behalf of tobacco research was fiscal: tobacco brought in more than $1,500,000,000 in taxes to the government, and yet received only $500,000 in research funding each year. Such a discrepancy was not just unfair but wasteful. “Mr. President, untold millions of dollars are being spent in medical research” on the connection between cigarettes and lung cancer, Scott argued. Nearly a decade before the Surgeon General proclaimed cigarettes to be carcinogens, discussing their health effects just sounded like “loose talk” to him. Scott chalked up some of the talk to ignorance: “I was astounded to learn how woefully lacking we are in knowledge of the chemical components of tobacco and tobacco smoke.” With increased research funding Americans could “get the answers to these basic questions we should have answered long ago.” Such knowledge, Scott reasoned, was “absolutely essential both to…advanced medical research [and] to agricultural research aimed at producing better tobacco at lower costs.” The senator suggested that the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), a department within the USDA, be entrusted with the task.¹

In his own lifetime, Scott was unsuccessful in his plea for a tobacco research appropriation. More than a decade later, however, long after the beloved Granger-statesman’s death, tobacco farmers finally got their research appropriation, part of which went to construct a 42,000-foot facility at North Carolina State College. This concrete achievement was won by nearly the same arguments that Scott had proffered earlier: the medical and economic problems of tobacco could be addressed through scientific inquiry at an agricultural institution. What changed? The attitudes of both the public and farmers after the publication of *Silent Spring* (1962) and the publication of the Surgeon General’s landmark *Report on Smoking and Health* (1964).

In the immediate postwar era, farmers became more politically organized, internationally oriented, and economically stable. The glow of these achievements soon gave way to darker attitudes. Tobacco farmers faced attacks from many factions during the 1950s and 1960s: environmentalists, health “zealots,” and even from the tobacco companies themselves. These threats fostered a collective attitude of defensiveness among tobacco growers. Within the broader public sphere, growers feared losing control over the economic and social meaning of farming. And within the trade, farmers had to contend with cigarette manufacturers’ allegations that the quality of the crop was diminishing. As surplus stocks of tobacco mounted at taxpayer expense, the source of tobacco farmers’ prosperity was increasingly in jeopardy. Meanwhile, farmers and the rest of the agricultural sector faced equally serious challenges from an emerging environmental movement. Alarmed by reports of ecological fallout from the USDA’s aggressive promotion of agricultural chemicals, and invigorated by Rachel Carson’s persuasive plea for chemical restraint in *Silent Spring* (1962), a consumer-based
environmental movement challenged agriculture’s stranglehold on pesticide policymaking. Within this context, farmers experienced the 1964 Surgeon General’s *Report on Smoking and Health* as yet another personal assault. In the end, the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to a politics of umbrage that characterizes many farmers’ worldviews right up until today.

But farmers were not just angry; they were defensive. Corporatist bureaucracies enabled farmers to launch a vigorous defense of their livelihood. Through the USDA and North Carolina State College, tobacco growers fought scrutiny from the Food and Drug Administration and, later, the Environmental Protection Agency. More than mere bureaucratic rivalry, the contests over tobacco production illustrate the producerist worldview. These methods, arguments, and institutional network served as a trenchant counter to the visions of regulation beginning to take shape in consumer-protecting public discourse and agencies. Spurred on by resentment at medical and environmental indictments of their livelihood, tobacco growers relied on defenses that benefitted from the authority and prestige of government and university-funded science.

To defend both cigarettes and chemical agriculture, tobacconen marshaled their own tobacco science. In the era after the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), the phrase “tobacco science” may sound like an oxymoron. This chapter challenges this quite reasonably cynical interpretation of tobacco science by considering what the endeavor meant to those most invested in the crop. Agricultural tobacco science reflected and perpetuated growers’ fundamental interest: controlling the production and expanding the consumption of tobacco. In justifying their use of a controversial herbicide against inter-industry critics, farmers came to articulate a logically coherent position of relentless
skepticism—a position sustained both by the importance of pesticides to farmers and by the role of doubt in scientific inquiry. Many historians of science have explored how tobacco companies exploited scientific doubt to forestall regulation of cigarettes. For farmers, however, doubt was positive and institution-building.

I. The Environmental Context of the Surgeon General’s *Report on Smoking and Health*

In September 1962, after a “noisy summer” in which its serialization in the *New Yorker* familiarized opponents and supporters of its arguments, *Silent Spring* was published. Eighteen months later, after dribs and drabs of newspaper articles on the growing mountain of medical evidence condemning the cigarette, the Surgeon General’s 1964 *Report on Smoking and Health* appeared. Both documents forced a public reckoning with the fact that cigarettes and chemical agriculture had profoundly disruptive effects on human health. The deadly properties of cigarettes and, in many cases, agrichemicals, were not immediately apparent to users. This allowed for disagreement over both the definition of the health “problem” and the scope of a potential government

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2 In their 2008 volume *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger ask why it is we do not know what we do not know. Tobacco foundational example of “agnogenesis”— ignorance as a construct that is “made, maintained, and manipulated by means of certain arts and sciences.” Naomi Oreskes, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010). Oreskes and Conway have recently shown how a cadre of politically active scientists (mainly physicists) have worked through think tanks, political appointments, friendly media outlets, and, most recently, the Bush administration, to fight “scientific evidence and spread confusion on many of the most important issues of our time,” especially global warming. Ibid., 8-9. Writing in the muckraking tradition, journalist Chris Mooney has also amply documented a “Republican War on Science.” His indignant narrative points the finger at many of the same scientists and think tanks cited by Oreskes and Conway. Chris Mooney, *The Republican War on Science* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
response. Both were “focusing events”—widely known documents that identified a once-unseen problem, mobilizing public pressure toward government intervention.\textsuperscript{3} They also sharpened the agricultural reaction: overwhelming anger.

Carson shrewdly enlisted public sympathy in her fight against pesticides.\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Silent Spring} contained a plain civic appeal, suggesting that environmental activism was downright patriotic. “If the Bill of Rights contains no guarantee that a citizens shall be secure against lethal poisons distributed either by private individuals or by public officials,” Carson wrote, “it is surely only because our forefathers, despite their considerable wisdom and foresight, could not conceive of such a problem.”\textsuperscript{5} The “public officials” to whom Carson obliquely referred in the opening pages of \textit{Silent Spring} soon received detailed and damning treatment.

Carson aimed her strongest language at a hulking agrichemical complex—part of an era that scholars have wryly deemed a “golden age of pesticides.”\textsuperscript{6} Farmers, cheered and plied by the Department of Agriculture and chemical manufacturers, indiscriminately dumped toxic chemicals onto their fields. She was indignant at the huge—and hugely ineffective—eradication programs blanketing swaths of the South, Northeast and

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\textsuperscript{3} I borrow this term from scholarship in political science and media history. Political scientist Thomas Birkland describes such touchstone occurrences as sudden, catastrophes that become known to the media, public and policymakers simultaneously. Frequently such crystallizing events have taken the form of spectacular disasters—Love Canal (1978), Bhopal (1984), Exxon Valdez (1989), and more recently Deepwater Horizon (2010) and Fukushima (2011). Thomas A. Birkland, \textit{After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy and Focusing Events} (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997). Even the public discussion of these environmental catastrophes owed a great deal to the legacy of \textit{Silent Spring} and the Surgeon General’s Report, which enriched the discourse surrounding risk.


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Midwest. These programs were designed to eliminate the supposed scourge of pests like the fire ant, gypsy moth and Japanese beetle. Instead, Carson charged, they irreparably damaged people, animals and nature itself. She condemned the reigning logic of the pesticides paradigm: that man existed apart and above the natural world, and that an assessment of the costs and benefits of pesticides could adequately account for the unseen, delayed, and potentially unknowable latent effects of chemical poisons.7

Specifically, Carson portrayed decision-making at the USDA as flawed and myopic. She asserted that officials, particularly within the Agricultural Research Service, systematically ignored the large-scale “delayed effects of absorbing small amounts of pesticides” in favor of approaches that provided immediate economic gain for a small slice of the population—farmers.8 But even by the chauvinistic logic of chemical enthusiasts, the pesticide campaigns of the 1950s were a failure. Insect pests like ticks, cockroaches and fire ants quickly developed resistance to poisonous inorganic chemicals like DDT, aldrin and dieldrin. These superbugs highlighted the coherence of the environmentalists’ concern for the “balance of nature”—the “built-in checks-and-balances by which nature holds species within bounds.”9 To underscore the stubborn senselessness of USDA policy, Carson pointed out that the issue of chemical resistance forced the Department of Agriculture to redouble its commitment to eradication.10

Silent Spring contained an appeal for social action premised on three clear claims: first, the USDA was conducting dangerous pesticide campaigns; second, the public had a right, if not a duty, to “the full possession of the facts” regarding the “risks that the insect

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7 See especially Carson’s chapter entitled “Elixirs of Death.” Carson consistently emphasized the importance of insects in maintaining ecological balance. Carson, Silent Spring, 73.
8 Carson, Silent Spring, 188.
9 Carson, Silent Spring, 10.
10 Ibid, 274.
controllers calculate;”¹¹ and third, it was therefore the responsibility of Americans and their government to halt these shortsighted and lethal practices, by prying pesticide policy away from USDA jurisdiction. Fundamentally, *Silent Spring* was a bureaucratic document—a call to action against the Department of Agriculture and the logic of chemical mastery.

In the early 1960s, the American public was anxiously attuned to the invisible harms around them.¹² The Cold War’s ubiquitous threat of nuclear fallout was merely background noise to several sensational public health events in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1961, the public became aware of increased childhood exposure to strontium-90, a carcinogenic radioactive isotope, and birth defects caused by thalidomide, a drug used to treat pregnant women for morning sickness. Agriculture came in for special scrutiny, too. In the “Cranberry Scare” of 1959, revelations of growers’ use of a carcinogenic herbicide caused the government to impound the nation’s cranberries just before Thanksgiving.¹³ For farmers, the threat lay in the public’s mere notice of agricultural chemical practices—practices that farmers understood as so essential they did not need to be discussed.

Mass anxiety and mass media combined to make *Silent Spring* a smashing success of a controversy.¹⁴ The public response to Carson’s serialized *New Yorker* articles was

¹¹ Ibid., 13.
¹⁴ For parallels on the media’s role in creating focusing events out of the socially confrontational civil rights milestones of the 1950s, see Michael J. Klarman, “How Has Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis,” *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 81-118. Sociologist Valerie J. Gunter’s empirical analysis of newspaper coverage after Silent Spring confirms farmers’ sense that the national media, on its face, appeared to favor Carson’s interpretation of
unprecedented. The magazine received a record numbers of reader letters, nearly all of them positive. By the time the third installment of the magazine series ran in June 1962, the New York Times was already recommending the book-length manuscript in advance of its October publication. Publisher Houghton Mifflin’s large first print run of Silent Spring was vindicated by the title’s selection for the Book-of-the-Month Club in October and its reprinting in a special edition by the Consumers’ Union. Two weeks after its publication, Silent Spring reached the bestseller list, which it topped for the month of November, until John Steinbeck’s Travels with Charley nudged it into second place in December—quite a feat for a didactic work of science writing that opens with a parable of a poisoned, birdless town.

But the text was a multi-media phenomenon, created, in part, on television. CBS Reports aired “The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson” in April 1963, boosting the book’s sales further. The documentary highlighted Carson herself as a sympathetic, feminine, and credible source. During the television interview, the soft-spoken Carson calmly answered the charges of shrill bureaucrats and industry scientists. For farmers, Carson’s appearance on CBS Reports added insult to injury. Two years earlier, the same documentary series had aired a damning expose of the work conditions under which migrant agricultural laborers—particularly children—toiled. “Harvest of Shame,” which

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15 Houghton Mifflin ordered a first run of 100,000 copies and an additional 500,000 within the first month. Priscilla Coit Murphy, What a Book Can Do: The Publication and Reception of Silent Spring (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 4.
16 Ibid., 3-5.
aired just after Thanksgiving in 1960, made millions of Americans aware of the miserable hours that had gone into their holiday meal. It also outraged farmers, who criticized the “so-called documentary” as inaccurate and exaggerated. The President of the American Farm Bureau Federation called “Harvest of Shame” an “obnoxious propaganda piece, slanted, distorted.” Beyond the specifics of the documentary, many farmers began to see the media itself as biased—asserting that the “Harvest of Shame” was built on cherry-picked sensationalized exaggerations. “The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson” was yet more proof that the media—and the public, by extension—had no desire to understand the position of agriculture.

Within the tobacco trade, this reaction to Silent Spring was limited to farmers. Cigarette manufacturers, meanwhile, leapt at the chance to exploit the book’s release for a public relations victory, using it to divert attention away from warnings that cigarettes were a carcinogen. The rabid response of the National Agrichemical Association made tobacco manufacturers’ responses to public health concerns seem sober, reflective and scientific by way of contrast. Ironically, the tobacco industry’s suggestion that cancer was caused by pesticides and not cigarettes did display a particularly rigorous regard for

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18 Farm Bureau Holds to Course: Vindication Seen” Christian Science Monitor, 16 December 1960, p. 4; “Mr. Shuman’s Till with CBS,” Christian Science Monitor, 11 March 1961, p. 13. An entire folder at the Tobacco Growers Information Committee archives is devoted to alarmed responses to the program.

19 “Harvest of Shame” has had a long, if less studied, afterlife, institutionalizing farmers sense of resentment and suspicion of the media. At least until 1997, new members of the Farm Business Council, an agribusiness lobby, received a book entitled Harvest of Injustice. According to the Council’s promotional literature, the book is a “comprehensive analysis of the near-criminal [Legal Services Corporation] assault on US agriculture.” “Approve,” 1997. Tobacco Institute. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/xmv64b00.

scientific inquiry. Tobacco farmers, therefore, were caught in a unique position vis-à-vis the manufacturers, media, and health activists. Tobacco farmers were squarely in the crosshairs of both battles. They were vulnerable to charges from anti-cigarette and anti-pesticide activists, which foreclosed the opportunity to deflect blame. Unlike the tobacco companies, they could not redirect unwanted attention by simply fingerling another industry as dangerous.21

By the time the surgeon general held a press conference to announce the release of the Report on Smoking and Health in early 1964, farmers were firmly convinced that the report was the result of media-driven sensationalism intended to generate a larger audience of urban consumers. In their own eyes, farmers faced a threefold threat that moved in lockstep: the media, consumers and urbanites. In eastern North Carolina, where tobacco was the lifeblood of the local economy, these rural-urban tensions were particularly acute. The very same Saturday special edition of the Raleigh News and Observer that splashed the findings of the Report underneath its masthead also carried an article entitled “Rural North Carolina Grasping for Stranglehold.” North Carolina’s county-unit system of representation in the General Assembly enabled the thinly-populated, tobacco-dominated countryside to hold “the life or death decision in the House over every bill introduced in the legislature.”22 On the national scale, city-dwellers,


22 “Rural North Carolina Grasping for Stranglehold,” 11 January 1964, Raleigh News and Observer, 1. The 1966 resolutions of the farm Bureau suggest four years after Baker v. Carr, legislative representation was still a sore subject for farmers. The 1966 resolutions, for instance, demanded that “Congress should approve a Constitutional amendment guaranteeing to the states the right to apportion one house of a bicameral legislature on the basis of factors other than population, such as geography or political subdivision boundaries.” (Emphasis added) “1966 Resolutions, p. 20,” Policies 1966-1967, Folder 6, Box 16, Records of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation (NCFB Records), North Carolina State University Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina (hereafter NCSU).
particularly after the Supreme Court’s political reapportionment decision in *Baker v. Carr*, undermined the congressional source of farm power; consumers wanted cheap items and were becoming intolerant of the high price supports that had kept tobacco farmers afloat. Despite being federally subsidized and locally overrepresented, it was likely that a tobacco grower from eastern North Carolina who picked up the *News and Observer* in early 1964 would have felt a twinge of fear, anger, and resentment both at the loss of control he might face, and at the unsympathetic light in which he was portrayed. Farmers’ self image was roundly attacked, forcing them to cling to their substantial political resources in self-defense.

Farm interests controlled pockets of American government responsible for regulating pesticides and encouraging tobacco production. This is precisely what vexed Rachel Carson and anti-smoking advocates. Multiple layers of bureaucracy produced a machine-rolled, manufactured, packaged and advertised cigarette, but it was the USDA that began the cigarette’s chain of regulation. Consumers had momentum and righteous appeal on their side. But producers had the frictional force of bureaucratic control, which served as a speed bump to the establishment of more stringent safety-enhancing regulations.23

II. The Bureaucratic Construction of Health

Despite the desires of public health activists, the Department of Agriculture retained legal control over pesticide use after *Silent Spring*. The 1947 Federal Insecticide,

23 As historian Thomas Dunlap notes, much to the frustration of environmentalists, even after a number of hearings vindicated Carson’s position after the author’s death “there was no change in pesticide policy, and there seemed to be no redistribution of power [as] agricultural interests still had the only effective voice on the issue.” Thomas R. Dunlap, *DDT: Scientists, Citizens, and Public Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 141.
Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) effectively lodged all authority over agrichemicals in the USDA. Agriculture’s control over pesticide registration undercut the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) competing claim to jurisdiction over food safety.

The USDA’s control over product registration was a non-partisan issue: during the 1950s and 1960s, Democratic and Republican administrations alike worked to unfetter the department. The “pesticides paradigm” reflected a technocratic vision of agricultural modernity—a chemically enhanced version of the “two blades of grass” ethos that had long reigned at the USDA.25

The USDA’s regulatory logic presumed that agrichemical agents were innocent until proven guilty. But what constituted proof of guilt? On what basis and by whom would a pesticide be judged as dangerous? Beginning in 1950, a congressional committee began to ask these questions. The House Select Committee to Investigate the Use of Chemicals in Food Products—commonly called the “Delaney Committee” after its chairman, Democratic Congressman John J. Delaney of New York—focused broadly on a host of additive and processing practices. A small portion of the committee’s time was given to discussion of DDT, pitting agricultural and medical interests against each other.26 USDA officials, agricultural scientists, insecticide manufacturers and farm interest groups argued that FIFRA already assured food safety. They defined safety in its

26 Dunlap, DDT, 66-70.
most proximal terms, focusing on acute poisoning, implicitly invoking the concept of a threshold. Producers also preferred to cite studies on populations with higher-than-normal exposures to agricultural chemicals—that is, farmers. This further reinforced the USDA’s jurisdiction over pesticides. All in all, theirs was as rough–hewn empiricism: if a chemical product did not poison a farmer—or even if it did and he recovered—then it was safe enough to use.27 This hands-off principle shaped the way that the Department of Agriculture discussed danger. Defenders of chemicals were not insensible to their dangerous potency. But they highlighted “improper use” of pesticides as posing a primary threat.28 There was a logical seamlessness to this argument: pesticides were safe; when they weren’t safe it was the fault of the farmer; farm activities fell under the jurisdiction of the USDA; the USDA should continue to regulate pesticide safety through labeling of use indications.

The Food and Drug Administration, private physicians and Rachel Carson, by contrast, focused on chronic damage resulting from long-term, low-dose exposure to pesticides. This perspective widened the population under study beyond the farm, to include nearly all American consumers. Scientists at the time knew that most Americans were ingesting pesticide residues in food and storing them in body fat.29 The logic of consumer protection was subtle and risk-averse. Pesticides may be dangerous; their danger extended beyond the point of application on-farm; consumers repeatedly exposed to chemicals in food may become sick after long exposure periods, breaking an

27 Dunlap, DDT, 119-121.
28 The National Agricultural Chemical Association, for instance, coordinated with the USDA in “educating the farmer to use pesticides properly, to read the label, and to follow the directions at all times.” Parke C. Brinkley, “Pesticides and the Pesticides Industry,” BioScience 14, no. 11 (1964): 27.
immediate causal chain from exposure to toxicity. The public health officials of the Delaney era groped toward an elaboration of what economists now call “negative externalities.” Farmers did not pay the full cost of pesticides (which included sickness to consumers) when they applied them to their crops. The public health position could not be vindicated by spectacular harvests or cheap food, but only by the absence of catastrophe. Consumer protection, lyrically expressed in *Silent Spring*, began from a position of humbled ignorance—scientists did not yet know how chemicals could harm consumers, but they suspected that chronic exposure could result in public health crises. By portraying pesticides as carrying a social cost, and then suggesting that those costs demanded regulatory intervention, health officials challenged agriculture’s libertarian ethos toward pesticide regulation.

This was a battle over science, its regulatory application, and its productive context. The 1947 FIFRA legislation reflected farmers’ positive evaluation of pesticides, and the USDA’s laissez-faire attitude toward their use. It did not require premarket testing by manufacturers, but only product registration with the USDA; it was not clear regarding tolerable residues on raw agricultural products; and it vested all regulatory powers with the Department of Agriculture—an agency that, as Rachel Carson

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30 For a summary of the scientific arguments against DDT presented at the Delaney Hearings, see Dunlap, *DDT*, 67.

noted emphatically a decade later, “by virtue of its role as patron to agriculture was ill-suited to protect both public health and safety.”

The unpopular eradication campaigns of the 1950s finally helped to mobilize congressional empowerment of the Food and Drug Administration. In 1958, Congress passed the Delaney Amendment, opening up new legal space for science in the name of consumer protection. Crucially, the Delaney Amendment modified the 1938 Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, not FIFRA. This codified what had hitherto been a quiet bureaucratic rivalry between the USDA and the FDA. The Delaney Amendment reflected and furthered the growing assessment of agricultural practices as creating significant off-farm costs. Chipping away at the pesticides paradigm, the amendment empowered the FDA to withhold the marketing of food products found to contain pesticides or additives “found to induce cancer when ingested by man or animal.”

Farmers had a very clear stake in keeping the Department of Agriculture in firm control of chemical policy.

III. Tobacco’s Chemical Dependence

Tobacco farmers did not think of the nascent environmental movement in such technical terms. But they did realize that bureaucratic rivalries could jeopardize their tenuous grasp on agricultural modernity. Despite tremendous growth in cigarette

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32 Bosso, *Pesticides and Politics*, 75.
33 Dunlap, *DDT*, 100.
34 The creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 can be traced to the USDA’s seemingly intractable commitment to defending farm and chemical interests over those of human health or the environment. Daniel, *Toxic Drift*, 128-129.

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consumption and the political savvy of the industry, postwar tobacco production remained an artisanal endeavor. Unlike the rapidly mechanizing and consolidating farms of the corn, wheat and cotton belts, tobacco farms were small and reliant on human labor. While the overall number of farms in America shrank by 45 percent over the first half of the twentieth century, the number of tobacco farms had actually grown by 21,000 over that same period. Even after the Second World War, when national trends toward consolidation intensified, the size of tobacco farms in North Carolina fell to just over 4 acres.\textsuperscript{36} In 1950 there were nearly 6,100 more tobacco farms than there were in 1940, even as the total number of American farms declined by 627,550 over that same period.\textsuperscript{37}

These small units absorbed a tremendous amount of labor. In 1959, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture estimated that it took 496 hours to harvest a single acre of tobacco, compared to 29 for corn and 5 for wheat.\textsuperscript{38} The difference was that farmers could not use machines: tobacco was graded and priced according to its physical appearance, but mechanized harvesters frequently bruised tobacco leaves. As a result, farmers had to do most of the work by hand. The federal tobacco program ossified these techniques, enabling the survival of the wooden barn and small farmer. Assigning a tobacco quota on the basis of acreage—between 4 and 5 acres on average in North Carolina—kept farms small. But it also incentivized intensive cultivation: farmers, while frozen within their assigned geography, could still increase yield—and their paycheck—

through the heavy application of agricultural chemicals. Some of these chemicals made harvests more bountiful; others eliminated tasks that had to be done by hand, such as pest and weed removal. Either way, tobacco production was hard, and to farmers agrichemicals seemed like the only thing that could make it easier. For a writer, or TV reporter, or any other urban critic to tell them how to do their job sounded as ludicrous as it was condescending.

In the early 1960s, farmers and their institutional allies mobilized to defend their pesticide practices. Raleigh, home to both North Carolina State College and the state capital, was a center for pesticides promotion. There, agricultural engineers and economists solidified their control over pesticide policy. Scrutiny, or even the mere suggestion of the public’s interest in agricultural cultivation, chiseled away at the authority of this agricultural nexus. It suggested that professional entomologists and agricultural economists abided by a crude standard of risk. It also implied that the agricultural bureaucracy embodied in the Agricultural Research Service was stubborn, even deceptive in its pursuit of eradication programs. Most damningly, attention to agrichemicals cast aspersions on how farmers farmed, intensifying growers’ resentment toward city-dwelling critics who did not understand how their business worked. From the perspective of southern agriculturalists, the heaviest users of the most dangerous chemicals, the attention of consumers and the media resonated with their sense of regional embattlement over the more widely recognized civil rights struggle.³⁹ It was one more example of outsiders meddling in southern affairs.

The reaction of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation (NCFB) illustrated the stakes for farmers. The state-level affiliate of the American Farm Bureau Federation, the NCFB reflected the view of elite growers and thereby stood as a powerful “voice of agriculture” in farm policy.\textsuperscript{40} The NCFB’s policy positions reveal a great deal about tobacco country’s predominating structures of control, as well as the broader fears and aspirations of agricultural elites. This grower-level institution provides a window onto how a resentful worldview was converted into a powerful defensive strategy.

Even before the publication of \textit{Silent Spring}—but, crucially, after revelations about the widespread aerial spraying campaigns— the Farm Bureau’s resolutions emphasized the need to “combat some of the unfavorable publicity now directed at farmers.” The organization urged members to avail themselves of every opportunity to “tell the American public the farmer’s story,” especially regarding “rural living conditions, agricultural opportunities and limitations.”\textsuperscript{41} As an interest group, the NCFB also made specific policy suggestions. Like the pesticide-promoting Agricultural Research Service, the Farm Bureau urged that a “realistic tolerance level” be established for questionable insecticides. Such figures should be derived through consultation “with the industries involved on controversial issues.”\textsuperscript{42} The NCFB thus sought to keep chemical monitoring within friendly hands. By creating its own rules, it looked to embed farmers’ preferences into the standard of judgment. More fundamentally, though, espousing tolerance levels was producerist science: it relied on an understanding of toxicity as an immediate result of exposure and presumed that a safe level could exist

\textsuperscript{40} The NCFB was notable, however, for its independent-mindedness on tobacco price supports, despite the AFB’s hard-line opposition to price subsidies for all other commodities.
\textsuperscript{41} “1960 Resolutions,” Policies, 1960-1962, Folder 4, Box 16, NCFB Records, NCSU.
\textsuperscript{42} Idem.
below the threshold. These procedural layers of defense built upon the Farm Bureau’s culture of disdain for consumer protection. The organization’s 1960 Resolutions (as well as subsequent versions) singled out the consumer-protecting Food and Drug Administration for special scorn, urging the agency to “administer its work so as to not to create panic among the public and thereby protect the innocent farmer from unnecessary financial loss.” Such a resolution, of course, implied that the agency had done precisely the opposite.

Agriculture’s position only hardened over the course of the decade. Shortly after the publication of the *Report on Smoking and Health*, Congress passed the Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act. Though tobacco-state congressmen considerably watered down its provisions, the law nonetheless mandated the now-ubiquitous warning label on the side of cigarette packages. When a tobacco producer read “Caution: Cigarette Smoking May Be Hazardous to Your Health,” he stared directly at the loss of his political control. Even more frightening than the label itself was the fact that the act empowered the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) to report on the tobacco industry’s marketing practices. This was an invitation to further scrutiny by individuals outside and oppositional to the pesticides paradigm. At the same time, Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman faced

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pressure to ban DDT from both an invigorated FDA and a newly vocal environmental movement.46

Orville Freeman served as agriculture secretary under both Kennedy and Johnson. The mild Midwesterner was unfamiliar with the tobacco crop and its culture, though he was keenly attuned to the political power of its advocates. A lawyer who worked to fuse the Democratic and Farmer-Labor parties in his home state of Minnesota, Freeman was content to let the tobacconmen fight their battles under the auspices of the USDA, while keeping his own measured distance. Freeman and Surgeon General Luther Terry had squared off once in front of the cameras at the taping of CBS Reports “The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson.” The televised debate was lively and civil, particularly in comparison to the roiling response to Silent Spring within the Department of Agriculture.47 And, indeed, Freeman viewed Carson’s arguments as serious, warning the ARS administrator that Carson’s “sweeping attack will undermine the public’s confidence” in government and should therefore not be “taken lightly.”48 Regardless of how seriously Freeman himself took the medical conclusions reached in the Report on Smoking and Health, he took the North Carolina delegation very seriously. The solidly Democratic bloc was frequently called upon by the Secretary to “set the record straight” on the administration’s agricultural agenda.49 As the long-serving chairman of the House Agricultural Committee, Harold Cooley was a particularly valuable ally to Freeman.50

46 Dunlap, DDT, 231-245.
49 See for instance, “Orville Freeman to Horace Kornegay,” 16 June 1966, Folder- “Agriculture,” Box 28, Papers of Horace Robinson Kornegay (hereafter Kornegay Papers), Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (SHC). Freeman frequently lobbied against the Farm Bureau’s agricultural policy platform. For instance, he penned a letter to all members of congress in 1962 urging them to ignore the Farm
With the support of national agricultural officials, North Carolina farmers redoubled their commitment to controlling both the regulation and the depiction of cigarettes as well as chemicals. Throughout the 1960s, the yearly resolutions of the North Carolina Farm Bureau suggested that some parts of the government were emphatically against farmers. In 1966, for instance, the bureau stridently intoned against “the use of government financed agencies, organizations or committees to develop policy or promote legislation.” This statement referred to a number of new or newly invigorated agencies: the scientific advisory committee that authored the Surgeon General’s Report; the Federal Trade Commission, the bureaucratic beneficiary of the 1965 Cigarette Labeling Act; and the FDA, a federal executive agency with a broad mandate to protect public health. These agencies did not just represent a threat to farm interests; they were undemocratic and “contrary to sound principles of self-government.” Regulatory threats forced farm organizations to articulate their specific grievances in a broad philosophy of government. Broad executive power was “undesirable.” Good government came from “units of government closest to the people.” As we have seen, in North Carolina, Farm Bureau elites held power locally as well. Through the crucible of controversy, a unitary defense of cigarettes and chemicals gained logical and institutional traction. For farmers, the forces attacking pesticides and cigarettes were the same: health zealots, creeping bureaucracy, emotional consumers, and a parasitic media that thrived on strife.

Bureau’s opposition to an administration-supported farm bill. “Dear Mr. Congressman,” 18 September 1962, Folder- “Agriculture 1962,” Box 78, Harold Dunbar Cooley Papers (hereafter Cooley papers), SHC.
50 Cooley was a reliable Democratic party-liner, attacking the Farm Bureau when its leadership sought to undermine Kennedy’s agricultural policies. “Harold Cooley to John Duncan,” 28 November 1961, Folder 3059, Box 68, Cooley Papers, SHC.
51 See Jasanoff, The Fifth Branch.
53 Idem.
IV. Producing Tobacco Science

For tobacco growers, it was as plain as a warning label on a pack of Marlboros that this ideological-cum-bureaucratic battle was just beginning. This was not a question of bureaucratic overreach versus yeoman independence. Farmers were not laissez-faire, opposing all forms of regulation. Tobacco growers, nearly all of whom were Democratic Party stalwarts, gave very pointed support for the pockets of government that supported the producerist agenda of market expansion, minimal consumer protection, and applied agricultural research. The bureau consistently lauded one venerable local institution in particular. Praising the “considerable progress made by land grant colleges” in “controlling and eradicating plant and animal pests,” the NCFB urged “expanded research” in insecticides, crucial in “reducing farm costs.” North Carolina State College synthesized the ideals of organized tobacco producers. It research agenda served the economic interests of nearby farmers.

In 1963, the Farm Bureau’s resolutions acknowledged for the first time the mounting concern over cigarettes. Just as it had encouraged more data on the effects of pesticides, the organization urged extensive research to determine the facts about tobacco. Praising North Carolina State’s “programs of resident teaching, research and Extension,” the NCFB urged the university to continue its efforts to “find ways of increasing farmers’ income and to maintain agriculture as the state’s largest industry.” When the NCFB called for more data on “the effects of insecticides, herbicides and

pesticides,” it surely hoped that N.C. State would be the institution responsible for its collection.56

At North Carolina State, personal connections were forged through multiple channels. If a farmer received any post-secondary education, he likely attended State. More privileged farmers, those who served in leadership positions on the Grange, Farm Bureau, Tobacco Associates, or Stabilization, were also likely to be very familiar with the school since many of these organizations’ annual meetings were held at the Velvet Cloak Inn, just blocks away from campus. Less elite farmers may have simply come for a meeting or lecture, which were always held in William Neal Reynolds Auditorium, which had been named in honor of R.J. Reynolds’ brother. Still others may have taken a weekend on campus to attend an agricultural “short course,” a primer on the latest farm techniques, the agricultural equivalent of a professional refresher course. Even those who did not venture off-farm could still read about the events, which were periodically summarized by the Progressive Farmer. At the very least, farmers would have come to know N.C. State through the extension service, whose activities were partially financed by the college. In short, farmers trusted the institution. Broadly, their interests were the same: to make farming more profitable and productive.

Historians of science have convincingly argued that the tobacco industry prospered despite scientific consensus that cigarettes were deadly. They did this by manufacturing a “controversy” where none existed by claiming that the causal link between cigarettes and cancer was not airtight. Tobacco firms created the idea of a “smoking and health controversy” by paying scientists to produce the research that broke

56 Idem.
the medical consensus. As historians have shown, the tobacco industry evaded regulation (and killed millions) by espousing a negative view of science—one that thrived on an impossible standard of doubt.57

A different sort of tobacco science was taking shape at North Carolina State. It was not intended to deceive. It was, nonetheless, weapon in the fight over the meaning of tobacco. Although they were angry, growers did not senselessly lash out at critics. Rather, farmers’ self-defense was dynamic and pragmatic. It ultimately exploited the cultural authority of science to maintain the agriculture’s dominion over tobacco policy. When the agricultural nexus in North Carolina argued on behalf of tobacco, they were not merely reflexively repeating arguments for chemicals. They were making tobacco knowledge independently of the doubt science proffered by the industry. *Tobacco Science* was an interdisciplinary journal by and for scientists working in all areas of production—“agricultural engineering and curing, biochemistry, chemical composition, physical properties, chemistry of smoke, entomology, genetics and pathology of tobacco and its products.”58 *Tobacco Science* and its contributors from North Carolina State were not pawns of the cigarette industry, but Big Tobacco undoubtedly benefitted from their research agenda.

*Tobacco Science* began publication in 1957, just as the consequences of smoking and pesticides began to bubble into public consciousness, but human health was not among the concerns of the journal—even smoking tests were done by machines.59

Published in New York and edited by J.A. Weybrew, a professor of tobacco chemistry at

North Carolina State, *Tobacco Science* was, by its own description, designed “to penetrate that aura of romance” surrounding the tobacco industry. The increased pace of research at “the experimentation stations, at the colleges and universities, on the farms and in the laboratories of independent concerns” necessitated a “centralizing” of research efforts. The editorial board, which was comprised of three professors of agriculture, two USDA scientists, and two industry researchers, reflected the journal’s breadth and aspirations toward professionalism.

All of the articles in *Tobacco Science* were highly quantitative and technical, but no one theme or discipline dominated its pages. It is doubtful that a botanist or tobacco chemist would have understood, for instance, the engineering behind an article like “Design and Operation of a Multiple Cigarette Smoking Machine,” or “Mechanical Transplanting of Bright Leaf Tobaccos: Human Energy Requirements for Transplanting Tobacco.”\(^{60}\) By the same token, agricultural engineers likely would not have the expertise necessary to understanding the chemistry behind the study of “Scopoletin in Commercial Tobacco Products.”\(^{61}\) And neither a chemist nor an engineer would have had an obvious interest in articles on tobacco genetics. Nevertheless, *Tobacco Science* suggested the emergence of a rigorous, solution-oriented corpus of knowledge about the weed—knowledge meant to enlighten rather than deceive.

*Tobacco Science’s* anti-romantic editorial stance worked on two levels. First, the journal envisioned itself as a product of “an era and industry sharply attuned to the correlation between science and progress.”\(^{62}\) The tobacco nexus in North Carolina and

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\(^{60}\) Idem.


scientists around the world internationalized this vision of progress. The first volume of the publication proudly proclaimed that “the Tobacco Literature Service at North Carolina State College” was helping to keep all scientists informed about relevant literature in the “many disciplines in the field.” *Tobacco Abstracts*, distributed to 588 individuals or institutions in the United States and 62 other countries, solidified North Carolina’s reputation as the purveyor of not only the finest tobacco in the world, but also the finest research. The information flow ran both ways, however. Foreign tobacco monopolies and the Modern Language Department at N.C. State translated 58 items from Dutch, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish in the first 11 months of the service’s existence. Ultimately, tobacco science was both rigorously global and ultimately local.

Secondly, the content of many articles addressed the persistent cultivation problem that growers and agricultural economists identified in tobacco cultivation: an inability to mechanize. This issue probably did the most to propagate the myth of tobacco’s romance as small farms and family labor were both responsible for and the byproducts of a lack of appropriate farm machinery. At the time of *Tobacco Science*’s publication, the rural tobacco belt was still dotted with wooden curing barns that had to be tended all night in order to give bright leaf tobacco its signature baked characteristic. By the mid-1960s, a few mechanical “bulk curers” could be seen on wealthier farms, allowing a few families respite from curing vigils. Most, however, were not so lucky.

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And some families were utterly cursed, as it was not uncommon for these wooden barns to simply go up in flames, burning up a year’s worth of work.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, scientists were determined to replace the wooden barn with the metal bulk curer. They chronicled their efforts in the pages of *Tobacco Science*, reporting on the multi-disciplinary collaborative project housed at NC State. Since 1955, agricultural engineers and chemists had been working together to minimize the chemical differences between conventionally-cured and bulk-cured leaf. By 1958, samples of bulk-cured leaf were sold at auction—a social experiment that validated scientists’ earlier work. The leaf sold for an average of $.62/lb—significantly above the government support price of $.50/lb. By 1960, when an article summarizing the project appeared in Tobacco Science, its authors concluded that not only were “Advancements in bulk curing presently well adapted for conventional harvesting,” but even more mechanization would soon arrive with the “important possibility of integrating mechanical harvesting and bulk curing.”65 Perhaps unsurprisingly, the agricultural engineers were overly optimistic. In 1978, geographers studying the “rural revolution in East Carolina” noted only “late and spasmodic” mechanization of cigarette production.66

Nevertheless, the invention, manufacture and adoption of the bulk-curing machine were triumphs of tobacco science. Scores of experts worked together to solve a problem of mutual concern. Agricultural engineers and economists identified curing as a bottleneck problem preventing further mechanization in the field and in processing.67

Engineers and chemists worked together to determine the content of bulk-cured tobacco,

while agricultural economists and industry representatives validated the commercial acceptability of the crop. The investigators of the bulk-curing device specifically mentioned their debt to the “systems approach” of scientific investigation. Their quest for further mechanization was also indebted to a team model of scientific investigation: scientists frequently involved tobacco companies in building prototype harvesters and in financing seed-to-smoke research. *Tobacco Science* reflected the interdisciplinary nature of applied inquiry, drawing more scientists into the metaphorical smoke ring, tethering their careers to the crop.

North Carolina State served as a research broker between industry and farmers. For instance, John Deere and R.J. Reynolds jointly developed a tobacco harvester because a professor of agricultural engineering put company officials in touch. 68 Five years later, in 1967, the head of extension research at the university sent a memo to the entire faculty of agricultural engineering urging them to “keep in mind” Philip Morris’ desire to “maintain a close liaison with the Agricultural Engineering group at North Carolina State University.” The extension director explicitly stated that the company’s desire to better understand the impact of mechanization on tobacco quality should inform the department’s “development of future studies.” 69

During the height of the smoking-and-health controversy, tobacco science existed as a field of inquiry intended to illuminate and not only to cast doubt. It was not independent of “Big Tobacco”—roughly half of the contributors to *Tobacco Science* were employed by major tobacco companies; the rest were part of the agri-industrial

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68 William Splinter to H. “Herb” Miller, 8 February 1962, Folder 8, Box 11, Papers of Charles Suggs (hereafter Suggs Papers), NCSU.
69 Kenneth Keller, “Memorandum on Excerpts of Letter from Dr. Helmut Wakeham, Phillip Morris, to Governor Dan K. Moore,” 13 March 1967, Folder 1, Box 33, Suggs Papers, NCSU.
nexus that, as we have seen, was defensive of tobacco. Pointing out the “legitimacy” of tobacco science does not exonerate Big Tobacco, however. In fact, the presence of a reputable and professional cohort of scientists may have provided “cover” for the industry’s claims to support scientific inquiry. Agricultural scientists were willing recipients of industry grants, which underwrote sound research—research that, by design, had nothing to do with tobacco’s carcinogenicity. Moreover, international professionalization and consolidation of the authority of tobacco researchers, facilitated by a publication like *Tobacco Science*, created a new flank in the industry’s defense.

Despite the fact that the journal steadfastly eschewed overt politics, the editorial stance of the 1962 issue made oblique reference to tobacco’s health problem, defining its own sober approach by contrast. “In this time of travail when the empirical approach appears to be abandoned or ignored by those who are fanatically dedicated to the postulating of some very unscientific theories on the use of tobacco,” the forward opined, “it is a source of strength to see in our midst such rich fruit of painstaking research.”

In suggesting that tobacco’s critics were emotional and unscientific, *Tobacco Science* echoed the attacks made by the agrichemical industry and the USDA against Rachel Carson. With its own corpus of university-funded tobacco research and supportive bureaucracy, grassroots tobacco interests offered a positive vision of their crop. While *Tobacco Science* was not beholden to Big Tobacco, its findings certainly benefited it all the same.

V. Maleic Hydrazide: An Industrial Chemical Imbalance

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70 “Foreword,” *Tobacco Science* 1963, III.
A case study of how growers negotiated their use of a controversial chemical herbicide illustrates the intersecting concerns over pesticides and cigarettes, and the type of problem that *Tobacco Science* sought to solve. Maleic hydrazide also dissolved the tobacco trade into its component parts. Sharing an attitude toward the cigarette’s critics did not mean that tobacco farmers and manufacturers always shared the same interests. The debate over farmers’ dependency on maleic hydrazide, marketed as MH-30, revealed the strange imprecision of tobacco quality and the attempts made by warring factions of the industry to define it. Maleic hydrazide highlighted tensions within the tobacco program itself just as the public was becoming more aware of the dangers of pesticide use and smoking. These dynamics made growers and manufacturers anxious and resentful of public attention, but for different reasons; both ultimately grew closer in a hunkered-down, anti-regulatory posture.

In 1958, producer groups began warning that new farm techniques were making American flue-cured leaf less desirable to foreign buyers. As the previous chapter has illustrated, farmers themselves actively expanded these international markets in the immediate postwar era. They did so by invoking the legendary quality of their crop. As a 1949 issue of the *Progressive Farmer* noted that when “Mr. Foreign Smoker” begins to think to himself, “Sa-ay pal, the tobacco in this here American cigarette is no better than what we can grow right here in our country,” flue-cured tobacco growers “will begin losing their grip on one of the richest agricultural prizes in America—our world-wide flue cured tobacco market with all the profit it brings.”71 American tobacco needed to be good, but also *better* than tobacco produced where labor was cheaper.

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The new cultivation techniques blamed for the decline in leaf quality resulted from American growers trying to reduce their own labor costs and maximize yield. In 1959, the export-promotion organization Tobacco Associates formed a committee to study “the causes of the deterioration in the quality of flue cured tobacco and make recommendations designed to correct the difficulties.” 72 After consulting with foreign and domestic manufacturers and private and government tobacco experts, its report concluded that quality problems could all be sourced to farmers attempting to get the highest yields per acre. Maleic hydrazide was named as a specific culprit in the crime against quality. But as we have seen, heavy chemical use was the logical result of prevailing incentives in agriculture. Chemicals were promoted by the USDA; and by assigning tobacco quotas on the basis of acreage, the federal tobacco program itself encouraged intensive, chemically-heavy cultivation.

In tobacco fields, the decision to use MH was easy. Growers insisted the chemical was “the greatest aid to tobacco production the farmer has experienced in his lifetime.” Instead of “hand suckering” tobacco—removing pesky, nutrient-robbing shoots in the summer heat before harvest—users of MH-30 could simply wear an applicator backpack and spray them away. For cultivators of the demanding “thirteen month crop,” MH not only conserved labor but also increased yield. 73 As one grower told the Wall Street Journal, “try pulling suckers under our North Carolina sun and you’ll hate anybody who wants to take that chemical away from you.” 74 Manufacturers, exporters and warehouse owners, meanwhile, opposed farmer reliance on the chemical.

72 Idem.
They claimed that foreign smokers just could not bear the “hot, sharp, strong, bitter and rank” taste of treated tobacco. They urged its elimination before it proved too late. As stocks of supposedly trashy leaf mounted in Stabilization—every additional pound costing taxpayers money—the chemical came to threaten farmers everywhere. If farmers persist in…the use of MH,” a tobacco exporter warned, “they will defeat the [federal tobacco] program.” Opponents of MH sought regulation in the form of a 50% reduction in the support price of residue-laden leaf. They hoped that this would incentivize a reduction in the use of the chemical.

In response to these growing concerns surrounding foreign markets, farm organizations, the Extension Service, and other industry leaders launched an educational campaign in 1959. As a grower-supported export organization, Tobacco Associates was an ideal watchdog of MH developments. Its postmortem of the 1959 harvest noted with satisfaction that, “substantial progress was made” in reducing reliance on chemicals. “Less MH-30 was used for sucker control,” and so “a proportion of it was sold on warehouse floors,” the report noted. But none of the incentives that led to farmer reliance on MH had disappeared. The North Carolina summers were still hot; tobacco’s labor requirements were still demanding; and, most importantly, the federal tobacco program continued to encourage high-yield cultivation techniques.

The pesticides paradigm crossed industry and exporters, splintering the ranks of the tobacco trade. Farmers and their elected representatives were not insensible to the arguments of industry. From their efforts at international market expansion, growers

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knew themselves to be part of a supply chain that they themselves sought to extend. Tobacco buyers invoked global commerce in two ways in demanding untreated leaf from farmers. First, they argued that foreign consumers—really foreign cigarette manufactures—found chemically treated leaf “thick, dense [and] soggy with a poor taste.” Second, they threatened to take their business elsewhere, to the burgeoning tobacco belts in Rhodesia, Canada or Australia where MH was banned. “The quality of leaf produced in the United States continues to deteriorate,” warned a 1959 Tobacco Associates annual report, “while that of foreign flue-cured producers continues to improve.” It was thus imperative that growers produce to the standards set by their higher prices. After all, these high prices purchased tobacco growers’ loyalty to the farm program itself.

So much hinged on the word “quality.” Tobacco was an industry whose growth strategy was based on the lifestyle-driven advertising of an addictive product. Although voluntary leaf grading was introduced to tobacco auction floors in the 1930s, the fact that such a service was voluntary and did not assure that buyers would pay a specific price for leaf underscored the capricious nature of the word. Buyers and sellers could point to general characteristics that made for high-priced leaf—color, texture, or aroma. But countless reports of discrepancies in prices paid for the same pile of tobacco by different buyers suggested that tobacco marketing was too idiosyncratic, leaf characteristics too subjective, and some characteristics impossible to ascertain at time of purchase (such as

78 Idem.
how tobacco might burn or feel wrapped in a cigarette)—to be encompassed by the word “quality.”\textsuperscript{79}

Farmers marshaled the ill-defined term in their defense, arguing that it concealed tobacco companies’ true economic motives. Growers frequently pointed out that MH did not make for worse tobacco. In fact, MH-treated tobacco actually sold for more money at auction than hand-suckered tobacco. If buyers representing the manufacturing firms or export companies were none the wiser, then how could there be a “quality problem”? Or, moving further along the chain of consumption, one grower noted in the 1963 hearing “cigarette sales have increased in spite of two billion pounds of MH-30 tobacco having been sold.”\textsuperscript{80} As another grower put it at the same hearing, “the question of use of MH-30 boils down to money. Who is going to make it?”\textsuperscript{81} Farmers contended that cigarette manufactures were not actually interested in “quality”—pointing out that buyers had been increasing their proportion of low-grade tobacco and filling cigarettes with stems. MH tobacco was denser than hand-suckered tobacco, which meant that each pound of tobacco purchased produced fewer cigarettes with higher manufacturing costs. Internal industry memos bear out growers’ suspicions. One British-American Tobacco executive privately estimated that leaf treated with MH produced 10-15 fewer cigarettes per pound than hand-suckered tobacco.\textsuperscript{82} In short, tobacco companies thought that they could make a plausible case that MH tobacco was too expensive, and they wanted a discount.

\textsuperscript{81} Idem.
\textsuperscript{82} Wall Street Journal, 26 Aug 1960, 1.
The drama over MH-30 was not animated solely by a price dispute within the tobacco supply chain. The stakes of the disagreement were heightened by the emergence of two other major actors: public opinion and the bureaucratic agencies intended to protect the public health. By the mid-1960s, each month seemed to bring a new study linking cigarettes to disease, causing tobacco companies to grow more concerned with the politics of cigarette consumption rather than the economics of cigarette production. This shifted the intra-industry fight in ways that actually made growers sound a lot more like industry lawyers, and manufacturers much less apt to push the regulatory angle.

Understanding the producer politics of MH is crucial for understanding the tobacco industry’s approach to regulation. Even though farmers and manufacturers found themselves arrayed against each other over farm-use of the chemical, both groups considered the USDA a friendly bureaucracy—one that would be discrete and protective of the claims of producers. During the mid-1960s, tobacco industry laboratories were beginning to find evidence that MH-30 was not just bad for business; it was potentially carcinogenic.83 The suggestion that MH posed a potential health risk actually slowed industry’s calls for regulatory scrutiny. One alarmed industry memo noted that “while the [tobacco advisory committee] members might welcome the banning of MH-30 by the USDA (because of its deleterious effect on filling power), they would find it embarrassing if attention was drawn [to industry studies].”84

84 Idem.
established to handle public relations problems of precisely this nature. One confidential
description of the results of ongoing MH testing expressed ambivalence over “how this
information could be used in the United States”—suggesting that emergent information
on MH may have changed industry calculus on pursuing regulation in the form of a ban
or discount. Tobacco companies sat on indications that the chemical was toxic for several
years. Nevertheless, the same official noted privately that “the industry can certainly
claim diligence in starting this work and if this information can be used, it can be argued
that the effects are less drastic in smoke.”

Ultimately farmers, dealers and manufacturers all achieved a sort of chemical
balance. In 1965, in response to the overlapping concerns about quality and
overproduction, the tobacco program changed. In 1965, after testimony from growers,
warehousemen, exporters, and USDA agents, Congress passed and President Johnson
signed a bill controlling the amount of flue-cured marketing through poundage limits. It
was explicitly designed to “follow fertilization, cultural, and other practices which would
tend to produce tobacco with market acceptance throughout the world.” After two-
thirds of growers assented in a referendum, the primary impetus toward the overuse of
MH-30 was removed. Moreover, because MH-treated tobacco was actually heavier than
non-treated tobacco, the revision in the support program may have doubly discouraged
the use of the product. Finally, confronted with actual evidence of toxicity, tobacco
companies edged away from a self-serving vision of regulation—that government

Liability Project. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/nyi96b00.
86 “Tobacco Acreage-Poundage Legislation Revised: Vote Set.” 2 March 1965, Folder-
“Legislation, Agriculture Tobacco,” Box 38, Kornegay Papers, SHC.
coercion was appropriate, even useful, on the farm and when conducted by the USDA, but represented overreach on a package of cigarettes.

By the late 1960s, tobacco companies feared extinction by regulation. “We have been sitting on the MH-30 ‘powder keg’ for three years,” wrote one industry scientist to a tobacco executive in 1968. To prevent the whole thing from blowing up, tobacco companies pioneered strategies of scientific denial buttressed with cold war rhetoric of consumerism and individual choice. Producers also articulated this vision of consumption. Six years earlier defenders had argued very nearly the same thing, drawing parallels between the beleaguered cigarette and the falsely accused MH: “We believe that the tobacco companies have rightly insisted that cigarettes not be indicted or convicted on health matters on the basis of opinions and inconclusive evidence. Why then are they willing to try to indict and condemn MH-30 without any reliable scientific evidence?” As a few farmers at the 1963 hearings realized, “tobacco does not enjoy too good of a reputation with the American Cancer Society or with the American public.” In 1963, one year after the publication of Silent Spring and as the Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee was preparing its famous Report on Smoking and Health, farmers began think defensively. Far from randomly reacting with anger at unfair publicity, farmers preached discretion. They sought to keep the problems within the trade private so as to not allow for medical or environmental standards of adjudication to dictate the rules of the industry.

It was imperative, then, that all levels of the industry “proceed cautiously,” keeping in mind that a “sound program” was in everybody’s interest. Another grower noted that the fight could be used as a dangerous opening wedge for a ruinous investigation into the tobacco economy. “Some one may, at any time, in order to get a headline, claim that MH-30 poses a health problem,” warned the manager of the Burley Stabilization Corporation. “We will have another cranberry scare.” Joining manufacturers’ concerns about consumer regulation to producers’ concerns about farm policy, another prominent grower argued that in light of the hostile media environment, “if we jeopardize our control program, taxpayers will not bale [sic] us out.” Public health attention to smoking and pesticide use enabled growers marshal the industry’s own logic against it.

The irony was that by invoking “quality,” tobacco manufacturers sought to regulate the chemical content of their product, which they knew to be a carcinogen. They asked for regulation of the pesticide on consumerist grounds, just as they fought similar arguments made by public health officials. The key difference was that the Department of Agriculture, through its attacks on Silent Spring and rivalry with the FDA, had proven itself sympathetic to the tobacco industry’s interests and arguments. Tobacco farmers, meanwhile, mirrored the industry’s own rhetorical strategy to justify their continued use of the chemical agent. Farmers and tobacco program administrators argued that more

89 Idem.
90 Idem.
evidence was needed before any decisive regulatory deterrent should be enacted. Growers began to sound a lot more like tobacco manufacturers, *even as they argued against them.*

The tension over maleic hydrazide is essential for understanding tobacco politics and science in the 1960s for three reasons. First, it demonstrates that tobacco farmers comprised an integral, politically adept, and image-aware part of the tobacco industry. Second, the fight illustrated how tobacco manufacturers tried to benefit from environmentalism, and how farmers could use industry rhetoric to blunt such attempts. Third, and most pertinent for those mining history for models of consumer regulation, the debate over maleic hydrazide shows how even an “evil” industry can do good. When economically threatened by farmers’ use of the substance, the industry disciplined itself in order to retain export markets. In the early 1970s, the Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee (TGIC)—the official “growers wing” of the Tobacco Institute—collaborated with USDA officials on a campaign called “Reduce Residues Now!” The intent of such a program was explicitly economic: the tobacco growers’ lobby wanted to preserve the $85 million West German export market, where stringent pesticide tolerances had been established. Five years later, it supported the Agriculture Department’s decision to ban organophosphates toxaphene and endrin for crops receiving price supports. And, since scientists had suggested a synergistic effect between pesticides and cigarettes in causing cancer, the industry may have unwittingly helped to reduce causal uncertainty in the carcinogenic properties of tobacco.

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91. William Anderson to Carol Hicks, 5 January 1972, Folder-“Pesticide Residue, RRN News Releases,” Tobacco Growers Information Committee (hereafter TGIC Papers), Duke Farm Life Homestead Museum, Durham, North Carolina (Duke Homestead). See Appendix, Figure 5.3.
Conclusion: The Benefit of the Doubt

For all parts of the tobacco industry, and indeed within American health culture more generally, the 1960s represented a period of profound instability. Americans began to ask questions about the health consequences of both pesticides and cigarettes. Public attention posed a challenge to the way tobacco farmers had gone about their business. Scrutiny within and outside the industry put farmers on the defensive, drawing them together. But in terms of regulatory solutions, the verdict was still out on how pesticides, cigarettes and even MH would be controlled. It was hard to regulate substances and products—like MH, cigarettes and pesticides—if you did not know precisely why they were dangerous. In North Carolina, doubt had clear material benefits.

The struggle over MH-30 was, in part, a fight to control the definition of tobacco quality; the articles in *Tobacco Science* testified to this concern among professional scientists. In 1964, Congress entered the fray. In January, the very same day that the Public Health Service announced that it would begin a campaign to discourage young people from smoking, the officials from the Department of Agriculture beseeched Congress to appropriate money for a research to “identify the constituencies of tobacco responsible for...health problems” in order to find “means to reduce or eliminate them.”94 Three weeks after the release of the Surgeon General’s Report, North Carolina Representative Harold Cooley, who chaired the House Committee on Agriculture, called a session of the tobacco subcommittee. In announcing the public hearings on the floor of the House, Cooley specifically noted that the subcommittee would not discuss the just-

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released *Report on Smoking and Health*, but would instead consider authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to “conduct research into the quality and health factors of cigarette tobacco, particularly to discover and emphasize these factors in plant breeding, culture, and handle of tobacco that goes into the manufacture of cigarettes.”

Cooley’s calm pragmatism—“we must accept the fact that millions of people will continue to smoke cigarettes, irrespective of the report just released”—was belied by the quick mobilization of tobacco-state congressmen on behalf of more production research. The following month, an additional $3 million was appropriated to the Department of Agriculture for research into “from the agronomic through the medical phases” of tobacco. These funds supplemented the $5 million set aside in the previous year’s budget for unspecified tobacco production research.

The research appropriation was intended to produce a clearer definition of “quality”—that nebulous term that, for a brief moment in the 1960s, could encompass both the cigarette’s health effects and its market properties. In March 1964, Cooley inserted an extension of remarks into the *Congressional Record* arguing that the tobacco appropriation would produce research that would “ascertain and preserve the use of desirable quality factors and characteristics…and… eliminate…factors, properties, or substances which may be detrimental to health.”

Within the context of the barely-contained fight over MH-30, Cooley’s remarks appear a canny exploitation of the double doubt over tobacco quality and safety. For tobacco producers, anxieties over the health

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consequences of smoking and the market consequences of overreliance on chemicals were linked. But both problems could be solved through interdisciplinary tobacco science.

Like the businessmen and public relations professionals defending the industry’s reputation, tobacco producers used calls for more research to forestall regulation. But such demands need not be seen cynically. Tobacco fields, auction houses, and plant laboratories were struggling to come up with basic productive standards at the very same time as farmers’ cultivation practices were intensely scrutinized on consumerist grounds. “Because of the implications on the health of the consumer from the use of tobacco with insecticidal residues,” one Kentucky congressman explained, “there is a continuing and urgent need for safer and yet more effective methods of control of insect pests of tobacco.”

In the days and months immediately following the publication of the Surgeon General’s report, there were, after all, many unanswered questions regarding the relationship between the plant and its smoke.

Three weeks after he released the Report on Smoking and Health to the American public, Surgeon General Luther Terry stood before the House’s Subcommittee on Tobacco. There, he gave his “wholehearted support” for the “additional research”

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98 William Natcher (KY), 110 Congress, 5/19/64, H.11354.
99 Even as surgeon general, Terry was an unlikely anti-tobacco crusader. The native Alabaman was himself a pipe and cigarette smoker. The surgeon general and a number of other physicians on the Scientific Advisory Committee eventually broke the habit as they became convinced that cigarettes were carcinogenic. By the mid 1960s, Terry was actively campaigning for the warning label; in the 1970s his advocacy helped to ban radio and television ads for cigarettes. But as C. Everett Koop, surgeon general under Ronald Reagan, recalled, Terry was no “headline-grabbing militant.” To the chagrin of later anti-smoking advocates, Terry’s Report on Smoking and Health included concessions to the tobacco interests, giving the tobacco lobby veto power over the members of the Scientific Advisory Committee. “Dr. Luther Terry, Former Surgeon General, Dies,” Washington Post, 31 March 1985, 34; C. Everett Koop, “An Enduring Memorial for Dr. Luther Terry,” Public Health Reports 100, No. 4 (1985): 354. John Parascandola, “The Surgeons General and Smoking,” Public Health Reports 112, No. 5 (1997): 442.
sought by tobacco state congressmen. Terry suggested several areas of agricultural investigation, all of which could plausibly exonerate the leaf. As the surgeon general put it, almost offhandedly, “as a matter of fact, most of the cancer-producing compounds identified in the cigarette smoke are not present in the native tobacco leaf.” In his brief appearance before the subcommittee, the surgeon general suggested further research into the burning process, methods of curing and cultivation, soil carcinogens, and the development of filtration systems. The editorial board of Tobacco Science—to say nothing of the congressmen representing tobacco-growing districts—must have been gratified.

Researchers at North Carolina State College, who were the primary recipients of government largesse, led the investigations. The construction of two state-of-the-art phytotrons—one at Duke University and larger, more lavishly funded facility at North Carolina State—testified to the importance of tobacco in anchoring the economy of the state, and the importance of North Carolinian institutions in writing the history of the cigarette. With a name that now evokes a fantasy of science fiction cinema, the phytotron had a distinctively Cold War lineage. As scientists sought to impose the certainties and methodologies of the physical sciences upon the study of life, the phytotron embodied the “modernist optimism” of Cold War scientists. The phytotron’s computer-controlled chambers were designed to provide biology researchers with the

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exact experimental control of the physical sciences—like a robotic greenhouse. At the time of their construction, only five other such facilities were in existence—one at the University of California, and others in the Soviet Union, Australia, France and Japan.

Investigations at Duke centered on general questions within botany and biology, but tobacco set the research agenda at NC State’s four-story, 42,000-square foot facility. Built at the intersection of concerns over environmental hazard, farm practice, and tobacco safety, the phytotron embodied agriculture’s hopes and fears. By controlling the conditions of tobacco’s cultivation, scientists, farmers and industry could determine what made “quality tobacco,” providing reassurance to a health-conscious public. Of course, science could not determine tobacco quality; it did not make cigarettes healthy or benign. But the phytotron’s solid walls and international renown did help to extend the USDA’s investment in the crop, establishing physical capital for the practice of “tobacco science.”

Completed in 1968, N.C. State’s phytotron was the bountiful harvest of a season of doubt. Its funding sources revealed its research priorities. As he pushed his idea for a “crash program” of tobacco research through congress, Harold Cooley communicated with the heads of tobacco companies, urging them to contribute funds toward “the physical facilities for a complete laboratory to be operated by government scientists who would render impartial conclusions on the research undertaken.” Industry documents reveal the cozy network of tobacco researchers that gave intellectual, financial and political shape to emerging tobacco science. J.A. Weybrew, the founding editor of Tobacco Science, kept officials at American Tobacco Company abreast of progress made

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104 “Phytotron,” North Carolina State University. N.d.http://www.ncsu.edu/facilities/buildings/phyto.html. See Appendix, Figure 5.4.
on the laboratory’s construction at NC State;\textsuperscript{106} Dr. Kenneth Keller, the director of
extension research and defender of chemical agriculture, successfully procured $300,000
from the tobacco companies in order to receive a matching grant from the National
Science Foundation.\textsuperscript{107}

The corporate scientist—the lab-coated counterpart to William Whyte’s
“organization man”—is familiar enough to historians of science.\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, the revelation
of the mercenary science produced under the auspices of the tobacco industry laid bare
the inherent tension of corporate science: industry scientists, like the biochemists working
directly within manufacturers’ labs or industry grant recipients, produced knowledge that
furthered profit rather than truth. This adulteration of an idealized notion of scientific
inquiry is what has fueled the outrage of cultural commentators, jurists, and historians of
science alike. But at North Carolina State, agricultural knowledge that sustained tobacco
and chemicals was less corporate than corporatist, combining state and private expertise
in the formulation of scientific inquiry and the dissemination of information among
farmers. N.C. State’s research had both the prestige of university science and the safety
of a zealously policed producerist vision of science-based regulation.

Tobacco farmers faced multiple threats in the early 1960s. They were angry with
the public for questioning how they farmed and what they produced. They were
suspicous of the media that relished, fed, and thrived off controversies—particularly
ones that portrayed agriculture in a negative light. They were furious at specific

\textsuperscript{106} J.M. Moseley to Dr. W.R. Harlan, “Visit from Drs. W.G. Woltz and J.A. Weybrew,” 24
\textsuperscript{107} John Y. Mason, Jr., to Dr. H. Wakeham, “Grant to North Carolina State University for
http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/oze94e00.
\textsuperscript{108} Steven Shapin, The Scientific Life: A Moral History of a Late Modern Vocation (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 2008), esp. chapters 4 and 5.
individuals—Rachel Carson and Surgeon General Luther Terry—and their bureaucratic allies at the FDA and, later, the EPA. But their rage was visionary, not blind. It consolidated grower organizations, mobilized the USDA on their behalf, and even pushed them closer to their erstwhile enemies, the tobacco companies. Tobacco science grew out of new pressures—environmental regulation, emerging evidence on health, and even the demands of the international tobacco trade. These same pressures gave rise to farmers’ resentful worldview. Tobacco science was a defensive endeavor. The very existence of the institutions of tobacco science were intended to keep tobacco-knowledge and, by extension, regulation, in friendly hands. Where the tobacco industry supported doubt science intended to deceive the smoking public, farmers lived within a world of their own construction—one in which tobacco and pesticides were safe. If this was plain fantasy, then they hoped that their preferred judges would issue the final word on safety.
Chapter 6: The Institutions of Umbrage

In June 1958, the President of RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company addressed a crowd of tobacco farmers. “We are interdependent,” Bowman Gray Jr. told the North Carolina growers. “We are members of the same team; we have a common goal, and we must work together.”¹ Never mind the fact that for the past year, Reynolds had led the effort to get farmers to reduce their reliance on the chemical MH-30, which farmers viewed as an indispensable labor savor; never mind the fact that Reynolds was tinkering with their tobacco blends—using reconstituted leaf, artificial sweeteners, sawdust, anything that wasn’t actual tobacco in order to purchase fewer pounds of heavy American flue-cured; never mind the fact that the entire industry was beginning to turn away from American tobacco leaf, toward cheaper supplies of leaf in low-labor-cost countries like Rhodesia and India. For Gray, whose father had presided over Reynolds when it eclipsed the locally despised American Tobacco Company, unity within the tobacco trade was a signature goal. What could bind farmers and businessmen was not the price of leaf, the quality of the cigarette, or the maintenance of American leaf’s prestige. The least common denominator shared by buyers and sellers was survival.

Farmers had long understood that growing tobacco was political, and that politics involved struggle. Accordingly, they organized into Granges and Farm Bureaus; they maintained close relationships with their congressmen, who were equally solicitous of farmers’ support. Most of all, their attentiveness to politics meant that farmers maintained a high price floor underneath their leaf even as the controls on all other commodities

were relaxing. The late 1950s were a watershed period in agricultural history as farmers everywhere began to hone their public image. For tobacco farmers specifically, public relations provided new opportunities for industry-government consolidation, as the general impulse to “Tell the Farmer’s Side of the Story” dovetailed with tobacco industry efforts to control the narrative of the increasingly contested cigarette.

In an important development in the political history of tobacco, farmers and businessmen came together to form the Tobacco Growers Information Committee in Raleigh in 1958. A vehicle for public relations, the TGIC drew growers, warehousemen and cigarette manufacturers closer together in defense of their trade. But for farmers, the TGIC was not purely reactive to public health scrutiny of the cigarette; nor was it solely the product of cultural conservatism pushing farmers into a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship with their historical foes in industry. The Tobacco Growers Information Committee was a corporatist solution to threatened breakdown of corporatism—that is, the right of economic sectors to determine and enact their own policies. In defending farmers, the TGIC came to articulate a positive vision of farmers. Neither conservative nor oriented toward a “free market,” tobacco farmers’ moral vision was nonetheless imbued with a reverence for the value of sweated labor, the primacy of the patriarchal nuclear family, and a suspicion of claims made on behalf of the consumer.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. I first examine how farmers’ experience of the war engendered a sense of resentment against consumers, laborers, and city-dwellers. This sense of economic and geographic fracture was institutionalized in government agencies, like the Office of Price Administration, the U.S. Employment Service, and the USDA, that were charged with managing wartime scarcity. But as the American
economy converted to peacetime conditions of abundance, a discourse of scarcity and resource competition gave way to topics around which many Americans could unite. Public relations proved to be the midwife of postwar consensus-building. The second part of this chapter examines how farmers tried to portray themselves sympathetically to the public—to “tell the farmer’s story.” Because they were unique in their dependence on a rigid farm program and because they were represented by the Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, tobacco farmers played a pivotal role in developing public relations for agriculture. Using an example of farmer-financed public relations as a case study, I embed this local campaign in contemporaneous national-scale efforts to rehabilitate the image of the farmer, which was increasingly tainted by taxpayer objections to the “agricultural dole” and consumer objections to the cost of food. The organizational ties farmers had been building since the 1920s allowed them to reassert authority over their public image.

The third part of this chapter turns toward the development in 1958 of the Tobacco Growers Information Committee—the farm wing of the tobacco lobby. Growing out of grassroots concerns, implemented through local organizations, and funded from both farm organizations and the substantial coffers of the Tobacco Institute, the TGIC closed to corporatist loop, enveloping, finally, the tobacco industry. While the first three part of the chapter focus largely on questions of organization and structure, the final section turns toward self-representations of farming. The discourse of farm organizations effectively concealed the presence of the state in farm life in order to throw into relief the dependency non-farm populations—specifically, union members, blacks, and people who lived in cities—on the government.
I. The Farmfront

Farmers had spoken with a vocabulary of umbrage since at least the last decade of the nineteenth century, when Populists asserted that a deflationary monetary policy benefitted wealthy, urban businessmen at the direct expense of the rural farmer.\(^2\) Tobacco farmers revived the language of sectoral and geographic umbrage during the Second World War. Farmers’ specific grievances were directed at the Office of Price Administration (OPA), which had instituted a ceiling price on a pound of tobacco. A price cap on tobacco gave farmers a very visible, calculable sense of discrimination.

The OPA was the consumer’s bureau. In the words of historian Meg Jacobs, “fair prices became a rallying cry as consumers and workers united behind the Office of Price administration.”\(^3\) The “war time fight against inflation” was the basis of this urban homefront alliance. Housewives and wage laborers fought with ration booklets, coupons, and price lists as the OPA enlisted “thousands of shoppers as its shock troops.” Jacobs characterizes the assault against the OPA as a late-war phenomenon—a move by anti-New Dealers to get the government out of the marketplace. Tobacco farmers could also pinpoint the two main constituencies the OPA was designed to serve: labor and consumers.

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Agricultural resistance to this urban coalition began as soon as price-controls were imposed in 1942, but it was not as ideologically encompassing as the phrase “anti-New Deal” might imply. Indeed, tobacco farmers were, even by their own estimation, the most strenuous advocates of government economic interventions into the “free” market. Farmers’ grievances in North Carolina were very specific. They felt uniquely burdened by price ceilings, pervasive labor shortages, and high labor costs for whatever productive bodies remained. As Flake Shaw, the president of the North Carolina Farm Bureau put it, “as a group, the farmers are probably more in favor of price-control legislation than most any other class.” Tobacco farmers did not have blanket resentment for government; they loved price floors but hated price ceilings.

To add insult to injury, farmers believed that the ceiling price had been calculated based on an exceptionally poor crop—“a crop much inferior in quality to other flue-cured crops subsequently sold and now being sold.” As a Wilson, N.C. farmer pleaded in a letter to North Carolina Congressman and House Committee on Agriculture Chairman Harold Cooley, “none of us had sold our best body type tobacco, and now the OPA has ceiled the price on the good tobacco on the basis of what the low quality tobacco was selling at.” There were distortions involved in price fixing, as the price ceiling effectively incentivized the production of lower-quality leaf—leaf that would not have fetched a high price a few years earlier. At the same time, the best grades of tobacco were immediately snapped up by the Commodity Credit Corporation, the U.S. government-run cooperative that was purchasing leaf on behalf of British Tobacco Companies, because

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5 “Raymond Sasser to Harold Cooley,” 30 August 1942, Folder 254, Box 7, Cooley Papers, SHC.
there were no upper limits set on the bids the CCC was empowered to make. This, in
turn, pushed up the cost of lower-quality leaf as high-quality leaf for domestic
manufacture became increasingly scarce.⁶

In a long, detailed, and angry missive to OPA tobacco section administrator
Meredith Kohlberg, Harry P. Taylor described the situation as “patently unfair to both the
farmer seller and the domestic buyer.” Taylor, the owner of a plug tobacco business in
Winston-Salem, was uniquely positioned to make this argument, which fused the
antipathies of both industrialists and farmers toward government intervention. As a buyer
of normally cheap tobacco grades, Taylor was particularly concerned with the inflation of
prices “of the heavy-bodied, non-smoking, non-exportable twist and chewing grades.”⁷
His appeal was thus patently self-interested, but it nevertheless represented a growing
sense that the government was doing too much to favor certain groups above others. Or,
as Taylor put it in a friendlier letter to the southern congressmen he implored to oppose
the tobacco ceiling, “God grant that we of the United States may be spared from a form
of government that is The Government. There is a vast deal of difference between one
that is Our Government and The Government.”⁸ That which served one’s own interests
was “Our Government;” that which did not was “The Government.”

For farmers, the OPA most definitely represented “The Government.” It was not
theirs; it served organized labor. The growth in the size and influence of the federal
government gave Americans ample opportunity to claim certain bureaucracies as their
own, and condemn others as impersonal, tyrannical and arbitrary. Tobacco farmers faced

⁶ Idem.
⁷ “Harry P. Taylor to Mr. Leon Henderson,” 3 November 1942, Folder 254, Box 7, Cooley Papers, SHC.
⁸ “Harry P. Taylor to Ellison Smith,” 29 September 1942, Folder 254, Box 7, Cooley Papers, SHC.
labor shortages occasioned by the construction of defense installations—new barracks, hospitals and housing developments at Greensboro, Fayetteville and Wilmington were siphoning off able-bodied men and women from the fields. And, what was more, a humming defense economy pushed up the cost of labor for those who remained on farm. As Flake Shaw explained, price ceilings and price supports needed to be adjusted upwards “to cover increased labor costs.” Thus the OPA—“The Government,” or “their government,” certainly not “our government”—came to represent a swath of America that benefitted directly at the expense of the farmer.

Even before the United States entered the war, the agricultural labor market in North Carolina was in flux. In 1940, Congress appropriated $9 million for tuition-free technical training. The program was an expansion of a program run through the New Deal-era National Youth Administration that enabled young men to enroll tuition-free at 65 participating universities nationwide. Three of these schools, North Carolina State College, Duke University, and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, were in the heart of the “Old” tobacco belt.

Observing the transformation of the southern economy resulting from war mobilization, one journalist explained that in 1940 “anybody who knew how to use a hammer and saw could walk into a job at wages far above the farm level.” Having fallen consistently since 1938, the farm population was more than twenty percent smaller in 1945 than just five years earlier. According to a 1945 Bureau of Agricultural Economics report, the war was responsible for the movement of “nearly 2 million farm people…into the armed

9 “R. Flake Shaw to Mr. Cooley,” 21 September 1942, Folder 254, Box 7, Cooley Papers, SHC.
forces and another 9 million...off farms.”\(^{12}\) Aside from a small bump in population immediately after the war—from a baby boom and the beginning farmer provisions of the GI Bill—this diminution of the farm population has continued unabated to the present day.\(^{13}\)

All this mobility did not sit well with the men and women who still farmed for a living. Moreover, white farmers in the south were particularly sensitive to black mobility—especially white tobacco farmers, who relied on black tenants for the labor-intensive harvest.\(^{14}\) Then-commissioner of agriculture (soon to be governor and senator) Kerr Scott made special overtures to his local Selective Service board to defer the draft of the “two colored men” in who worked on his farm—neither of whom asked the commissioner “to make any effort to get him deferred.” Claiming to have come up empty in his search for replacement labor for the men (especially one described as “a reasonably good tractor operator”), Scott asked for “whatever consideration you can give the deferment of these two men.” Though no record exists of the response of the board, Scott’s subsequent search for labor suggests that his two operators may have left the farm. On behalf of other leading farmers in Alamance County, Scott appealed to a local judge for the use of prison labor. “We are wondering if it would be possible to work out some arrangement with you by which you could assign prisoners serving a thirty day


sentence…for the purpose of assisting us with filling our silos.” 15 The judge, referring to Scott by his first name, professed absolute sympathy “for the dilemma and difficulty” faced by local farmers. But even the criminals of Alamance were sharing in wartime prosperity as “it seems that everybody now has sufficient money to pay a fine” rather than serve their sentence. 16 The judge helpfully suggested, though, that Scott look into a little-used provision in the prison labor laws that “allows for the county commissioner to hire out defendants that are convicted for failing to support their wives and children.” 17 The racial implication of this statement would have been obvious to two white political leaders in North Carolina at the time. 18 What may have looked like paternalism (draft deferral for farm workers), or pragmatism to white farm operators looked a lot like slavery to African Americans. 19 Two years later, Scott tried to secure the naturalization of a black worker “imported” through a Bahamian labor exchange. In control of productive land and bodies, but impelled by economic forces beyond his control, Scott was in a position familiar to southern patriarchs.

Most farmers were less well-placed than Scott to secure help, but they still had a few government agencies on their side. State and federal agricultural officials at one farm meeting in Virginia hailed the government’s decision to shut down all WPA projects unconnected with defense in order to free up able bodies for the harvest, underscoring

15 “W. Kerr Scott to Judge Adrian Carroll,” 12 July 1943, Folder “Personal-Farm Labor,” Box 1-“General Correspondence A-F,” W. Kerr Scott Personal Papers (hereafter Scott Personal Papers), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (NCDAH).
16 “Adrian Carroll to W. Kerr Scott,” 12 July 1943, Folder -“Personal-Farm Labor,” Box 1-“General Correspondence A-F,” Scott Personal Papers, NCDAH.
17 Idem.
18 The literature on the discourse of pathology surrounding the black family is voluminous. See Goluboff has documented extensive evidence of African-American peonage facilitated by planter elites and justified by the farm labor shortage. See also: Douglas A. Blackmon, Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II (New York: Doubleday, 2008).
once again the nuance in how farmers saw the power of the government and the role of executive agencies. Farmers actively sought labor market interventions that could save them money. They may have resented the WPA and the NYA as agencies that steered young men toward defense projects or towns; but farmers welcomed the interventions of the United States Employment Service (USES), which grew out of the dissolution of the peacetime make-work programs. Through the efforts of the USES and a war-mobilized Farm Security Administration, tent cities and migratory labor camps soon dotted the outskirts of farm communities.

As they saw labor costs rise, those remaining on the farm pressured Congress for farm exemptions to the draft, a steady stream of migrant labor, and for upward revisions to commodity supports. From barely literate growers to their representatives in Raleigh and Washington, those involved in the tobacco economy were livid at what they perceived as preferential treatment given to other economic groups. Citing bad faith behavior on the part of the Secretary of Agriculture in reducing tobacco allotments in 1943—“even though farmers were given the assurance of [greater government] support”—North Carolina Governor Melville Broughton took the drastic step of closing all auction warehouses in the state in October. Upon the “unanimous recommendation of meetings of growers, warehousemen and officials,” Broughton sent a telegraph to the entirety of the North Carolina congressional delegation “vigorously demand[ing]

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immediate action for the protection of farmers.”\textsuperscript{22} Broughton’s marketing interposition was eventually resolved through government purchase of leaf. This was necessary to keep businesses—restaurants, car dealerships, and myriad other retail establishments humming, as eastern Carolina ran on the money that farmers received at auction. The governor’s decision to inform the Washington delegation, \textit{ex-post-facto}, of his single-handed decree suggests intense resentment on the ground in North Carolina.\textsuperscript{23} Broughton’s denunciation of the federal government—his exercise of gubernatorial power on behalf of the state’s agriculture—had easy resonance among white southerners.\textsuperscript{24} But his spleen for the OPA belied a more complex relationship to centralized authority. Unlike his nineteenth-century predecessors, Broughton did not criticize the government for meddling in the affairs of the southern economy. He criticized it for \textit{not doing enough}.

Other leaders echoed Broughton’s accusation that Washington had failed farmers. His successor, R. Gregg Cherry, stoked the flames of resentment. At a meeting in Wendell, a small town about twenty miles from Raleigh, Cherry told farmers that their efforts to serve as the “smokehouse and granary to the World” had gone unrecognized.\textsuperscript{25} In fact, according to Cherry, the North Carolina farmer was “in desperate danger of becoming out greatest casualty of this present global war, unless something is done to

\textsuperscript{22} “Outline of Subject Matter, Address of Gregg Cherry,” 1 May 1944. Folder- “Ag Commissioner,” Box 14 (Agencies, Commissions, Departments, Institutions, 1944), Papers of Governor R. Gregg Cherry (hereafter Cherry Papers), NCDAH.

\textsuperscript{23} See “Tobacco 1941, 1942, 1943,” Box 3701, Office of Price Administration, Record Group 188 (RG188), National Archives and Record Administration-II (NARA-II), College Park, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{24} For anti-federal rhetoric and midcentury southern political economy see: James T. Patterson, \textit{Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress} (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967).

\textsuperscript{25} “Outline of Subject Matter, Address of Gregg Cherry,” 1 May 1944, Folder- “Ag Commissioner,” Box 14 (Agencies, Commissions, Departments, Institutions, 1944), Cherry Papers, NCDAH.
relieve his situation and bring about a more even and fair balance of economic conditions.”

The governor pandered to his Farm Bureau audience. Farmers never asked “WHY,” but only “WHERE, WHEN AND HOW” they could help in the war effort. But everyone knew it took more than good will and good soil to make a crop. “It takes labor and elbow grease.” And unlike organized factory labor, empowered by the wartime labor market and by the right to collectively bargain,

The whistle never blows for this kind of labor. There are no holidays or extra hours for which they receive a stipend. These farm production items must have attention every day in every week in every month during the growing season.

Cherry’s oblique references to provisions of the 1937 Fair Labor Standards Act—the eight hour day, overtime, minimum wages, the abolition of child labor—were not meant to praise organized labor. If anything, these labor provisions seemed proof of the laboring man’s lassitude and the superior work ethic of farmers. This argument resonated with men like Royce Allegood, a white tobacco farmer in Ayden, North Carolina in the heart of the eastern belt. Stirred to anger after a grower meeting in Greenville in 1942, Allegood wrote to Congressman Cooley complaining of the “highway robbery prices for labor.” Government policy had kept farmers “always underpaid and overworked” while empowering “every bum, grafter and crook who would beg borrow or steal a union card” to “join…the forces of racketeering labor.”

The tobacco belt’s vision of American political economy was organized around zero-sum dichotomies: agriculture and labor; white and black; rural and urban; producer

26 Idem.
27 “Shortage of Manpower on Farm,” ca. 1944, Folder-“Ag. Commissioner,” Box 14 (Agencies, Commissions, Departments 1944), Cherry Papers, NCDAH.
28 “Royce Allegood to Harold Cooley,” 23 September 1942, Folder 254, Box 7, Cooley Papers, SHC.
and consumer. The fact that the federal government had expanded to incorporate these constituent groups into a growing number of administrative agencies proved, in some sense, that prosperity for the farmer truly was a zero-sum proposition: appropriations had to balance out in the budget. The resolutions of the North Carolina Farm Bureau during this era, for instance, were keenly attentive to the dollars and cents of the macroeconomy of both the nation and of North Carolina. Likewise, in its 1945 recommendations, the Master of the North Carolina Grange urged the governor to make sure that “the agricultural country—the open country—should be as well represented as the city” on appointed commissions and councils.

By war’s end, the OPA symbolized the politicization of wages and prices. According to Meg Jacobs, this had far-reaching implications for American civic life. “Powerful unions, mobilized consumers, and a strong state that institutionalized and legitimated an expansive notion of economic citizenship” rose out of the embers of homefront battles over prices. Consumers were not the only ones to enter the peacetime economy with new ideas about economic entitlement. Farmers did as well. But unlike big business—that other key sector legendarily opposed to labor’s wartime gains—farmers did not equate fair economic practices with an “all-out assault on the New Deal and its allies.” As tobacco leadership in North Carolina planned for peacetime production after

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29 The 1945 recommendations of the NCFB to the North Carolina commissioner of agriculture, legislature, and governor “respectfully request the Budget Commission and the Appropriations Committee review carefully the salaries of the Extension employees.” “Resolutions Adopted by the Directors, Executive Committees, and Advisory Committee of the North Carolina Farm Bureau,” 19 January 1945, Folder- “Dept. Ag #2”, Box 18 (Agencies, Commissions, Departments and Institutions, 1945-1948), Cherry Papers, NCDAH.
30 “Harry B. Caldwell to R. Gregg Cherry”, 15 February 1945, Folder- “Dept. Ag #2”, Box 18 (Agencies, Commissions, Departments and Institutions, 1945-1948), Cherry Papers, NCDAH.
31 Jacobs, 221.
32 Idem.
the war, they were adamant that federal support, expressed through New Deal-era administrative agencies, would continue to safeguard their prosperity. B.C. Mangum, the acting administrator of the Production and Marketing Administration (PMA) wrote to Cherry in gratitude for the governor’s support of “Federal all-risk crop insurance.” With terms unthinkable in the private marketplace, crop insurance extended the agricultural reform efforts of the 1930s—justified in the very same terms as production control: “a means of assuring economic stability.” A figure like Mangum—a wealthy farmer and businessmen who was part of the agricultural bureaucracy (serving on AAA and PMA committees) at the same time as he held leadership positions in the Farm Bureau—typified the public-private governance of the farm economy. Far from launching an assault against the New Deal order, the North Carolina Farm Bureau congratulated itself for courting the government resources that its members administered.

II. Marketing the Farmer

In the postwar era, farm organizations in North Carolina saw government as a key to their success. But it was not the only key. As Americans began speak a language of economic entitlement, farmers increasingly had to justify agriculture policy to citizen-consumers. Farmers were not seeking recognition plaudits from urban-dwelling Americans. They wanted to describe their livelihoods in a way that would forestall further debate about the role of agriculture in the American economy. They wanted to use public relations in order to be left alone—to seal the borders of discourse on agriculture.

33 “FCI Tips. Deadline Dates…Signup Progress…Loss,” ca. 1945, Folder- “Dept. Ag #2”, Box 18 (Agencies, Commissions, Departments and Institutions, 1945-1948), Cherry Papers, NCDAH.
34 Idem.
35 Idem.
The war’s acceleration of demographic change made it imperative that farmers assert their unique right to speak on agricultural matters. The number of people living on working farms had dropped by sixteen percent since 1940, and a largely white, rural, non-farm population became more visible, growing by over fifty percent. As white North Carolinians lost a direct, sweated connection to the farm, agricultural leaders saw an opportunity to remind them of the values instilled and represented by the land. Since rural life had become decoupled from farm-life, however, agricultural leaders created organizations to encompass a geography rather than a mode of labor.

On a Monday morning in August 1952, sixteen men, none of them strangers to each other, met in the Raleigh offices of the Tobacco Stabilization building. These men represented local, state, and national public and private farm organizations. They met to discuss how official government agencies could best work with the farm organizations to which they owed their “effectiveness.” The charge of this umbrella organization was to coordinate the many moving parts of North Carolina’s farm agencies—to help agricultural workers tell farmers which farm demonstration, policy meeting, or farm tour was happening when and where. This agricultural corporatism also sought to embrace the corporation—notifying “business representatives, such as bankers, machinery and equipment dealers, fertilizer dealers, seed dealers, etc. who might have a special interest

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36 In attendance on the private side: the North Carolina Farm Bureau and Grange were represented by their presidents; an elderly Clarence Poe, still editor of the Progressive Farmer, E.Y. Floyd, representing the Plant Food Institute. The director of the State Fair committee was also present, as was the Dean of Agriculture at NC State.

37 “Minutes of Meeting North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies,” 5 August 1952, Folder 6, Box 2, North Carolina Agricultural Organizations Records, North Carolina State University Special Collections, Raleigh, North Carolina (NCSU).
in the type of information to be available at a particular meeting.”\(^{38}\) In consolidating the publicity for agricultural events, farm leaders also sought to present a unified front to the public—to keep discussion of “any differences that might occur between National and State programs with reference to farm organizations” among friends.

The following May, at a dinner in North Carolina State cafeteria, the group, which had so far called itself the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agricultural Agencies (BFOA), transferred some of its duties to the North Carolina Extension Service.\(^{39}\) It seemed like a logical, pragmatic move. Through the Extension Service, Board personnel could qualify for “Federal and state retirement benefits”; the government could underwrite the literal cost of information dissemination through the franking privilege. Alongside these dollars-and-cents benefits of government incorporation were the organizational and educational benefits. Through the Extension Service, the Board of Farm Organizations could be “supervised;” their “travel accounts, annual leave, sick leave [and] holidays” could be managed; the Board could utilize the expertise of “subject matter specialists” and “research workers;” and, crucially, the Extension Service had a Publications’ Office, essential for preparing the “visual aids, bulletins, [and] charts” that could tell the farmer’s story.\(^{40}\) Public relations for agriculture meant shoring up farming’s most formidable assets: the proximity of “private” groups to state power, and distance between this corporatist arrangement and the potential scrutiny of consumers.

\(^{38}\) “To County and District Personnel of Agricultural Agencies,” 23 April 1953, Folder 6, Box 2, North Carolina Agricultural Organizations Records, NCSU.
\(^{39}\) “Minutes of Meeting of North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies,” 22 May 1953, Folder 6, Box 2, North Carolina Agricultural Organizations Records, NCSU.
\(^{40}\) Idem.
Through the BFOA, farm organizations, the state, and rural development groups came together as boosters for rural life. This represented a reversal of the development ethos of late nineteenth century articulated by men like Henry Grady. Midcentury agriculturalists in North Carolina saw economic salvation not in northern-financed industrial development, but in government support for the agricultural economy. From the group’s inception and its partial incorporation into the Extension Service, the BFOA repeated a classic pattern of tobacco belt governance. Leaders representing private organizations and government agencies came together to create a new organization; this doubly hybrid group—an organization that blended public and private bodies and was itself a quasi-government agency through affiliation with the Extension Service—then sought “grassroots” support in its funding mechanism.

The BFOA’s greatest achievement was the “Nickels for Know-How Campaign.” “Nickels for Know-How” was an educational fundraising drive that began in 1951. For every ton of feed and fertilizer they purchased, farmers paid an additional nickel into a fund that went toward agricultural research and extension. Fertilizer dealers and manufacturers were thus explicit stakeholders in this form of rural governance as their products became vehicles for agricultural research. Nickels for Know-How turned selling nitrates into a civic act, and helped to complete the circle of information and interest in agriculture. If farmers and agribusinesses organized their own political and economic lives, and even funded their own research (at least in part), what right did any other group

have to intervene in their affairs? The campaign, currently in its sixty-second year of
operation, was funded just like Tobacco Associates—the tobacco promotion organization
(discussed in chapter 4). While the minutes of BFOA meetings do not say so explicitly,
E.Y. Floyd was likely a key initiator of “Nickels for Know How.” A flue-cured
frontiersman whose lifetime coincided with the most significant turning points in the
crop’s political history, Edward York Floyd was born into a farm family in 1897 in
Granville County, North Carolina.42 At the time, the hilly county, in along the Virginia
border, was the very heart of flue-cured production. As the crop moved southeast, so did
Floyd, ending up finally in Raleigh. And as tobacco became more regulated by
government agencies, so too did Floyd begin a life of administration. With a degree in
agriculture from NC State, he found work in the AAA in 1933, travelling all over the
state as the tobacco specialist within the extension service—a highly visible, important
job in North Carolina.

By 1947, Floyd was sufficiently well known to the state’s farmers to be referred
to as “our old friend” by the announcer of the “Farm News Round-Up” radio show. Floyd
ended up behind Frank Jeter’s radio microphone to publicize the newly formed Tobacco
Associates. Jeter, the director of the Department of Agricultural Information at N.C.
State, enthusiastically questioned Floyd and Tobacco Associates founder Jack Hutson
about how the new promotion organization would work in North Carolina. There, the
General Assembly had just passed a law allowing growers to finance the group through a
tax on their tobacco-growing acreage; until these self-assessment funds kicked in,
Tobacco Associates was supported through donations from “warehousemen, export leaf

42 Year: 1920; Census Place: Wilton, Granville, North
Carolina; Roll: T625_1301; Page: 16A; Enumeration District: 109; Image: 62.
dealers, bankers, merchants, and fertilizer manufacturers and dealers;” and through the expertise of government, as the “Extension Service in North Carolina [had] agreed to take the responsibility for helping with the educational part of the campaign.”

As secretary of the umbrella Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, Floyd was at the center of the state’s agricultural universe at the start of the “Nickels for Know-How” campaign. In striking parallel to Tobacco Associates’ origins, Floyd reported that Nickels for Know-How received support first from area businesses, and then secondarily and permanently from self-assessment. As in the case of Tobacco Associates, a referendum vote authorizing the Nickels for Know-How fertilizer tax was authorized by the North Carolina General Assembly. The referendum provision of the educational campaign meant that rural leaders could not only claim that farmers supported their own research efforts in dollars-and-cents terms; but that, like the farm program referenda or the Tobacco Associates vote, the campaign was itself a democratic exercise. When the Assembly passed the authorizing legislation, the referendum was itself put to a vote. Ninety one percent of North Carolina farmers, including African American farmers, voted their approval.

“Nickels for Know-How” deepened the relationship between agricultural agencies, businesses, farmers and North Carolina State College. These groups grew so close in order to shut out the taxpayer. In a bemused piece on the inventive financing of

43 “Farm News Round-Up,” 28 April 1947, Folder “b-Articles and Talks 1947”, Box 1, Papers of John B. Hutson (hereafter Hutson Papers), Special Collections Division, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina (ECU).
new philanthropic ventures in the south, the *Christian Science Monitor* observed that “not a penny of the taxpayer’s money was expended” on the program itself. Though with Cooley at the helm of the House Committee on Agriculture, North Carolina farmers and agricultural research received a proportion of federal agricultural appropriations, including money that trickled down from the USDA into the extension service that was charged with publicizing and supporting “Nickels for Know-How.” Indeed, the state’s agriculture commissioner was pleased to note that the program actually had increased state agriculture appropriations, as lawmakers felt “more inclined to help a segment of the economy that is already trying to help itself.” In the first five years of the program’s operation, farmers raised nearly one million dollars, with each farmer contributing less than 40 cents a year. The money went directly to NC State, where by 1956 sixteen professorships, 20 graduate students, and 38 projects were essentially funded by farmers. By 1975, the program had raised nearly $4 million, and NC State had come to rely on it to generate $190,000 of its annual budget and fund sixty academic positions.

Given the state’s economy and the personnel charged with program oversight, it is highly likely that most of the “Nickels” money went toward tobacco research. For instance, agronomists at NC State directly credited the program with funding research that helped mitigate tobacco disease loss that had cost more than $20 million a year. But “Nickels” also funded inquiries whose results were less easily quantified, and perhaps more socially transformative, including research into tobacco mechanization, marketing,

47 G.B. Watson. “North Carolina Tobacco Foundation.1975. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/lyd84e00. Development Council report of North Carolina State University; The language used by the chairman of NC State’s development Chairman is significant: “the unique program generates approximately $190,000 annually for NCSU.” The money farmers spent on fertilizer was also money for the university.
and pesticides.\textsuperscript{48} Regardless of measurable outcomes, the very structure of the “Nickels” campaign transformed the university into a stakeholder in farmers’ political and purchasing choices. It also established a precedent whereby private entities—either foundations or corporations—came to underwrite a large proportion of university activities. As the state agriculture commissioner noted a few years after the program’s inception, one unintended benefit of “Nickels” was that it stimulated private contributions toward agricultural research. In 1955, for instance, the assistant to the university chancellor sent the Vice President for Research at Philip Morris a warm letter thanking the tobacco company for a $5000 contribution toward “increased tobacco research.” Pointedly, the university administrator specifically referenced “Nickels for Know-How” as an example of grassroots support for the university’s endeavors.\textsuperscript{49}

Grower-supported research, education, and extension publicly underscored \textit{and generated} self-reliance for farmers. Nickels for Know-How helped to create university structures that could portray farming in a positive light; more importantly, though, the very structure of the program—(state supported) farmer self-assessment—insulated farmers from scrutiny. Inoculation from taxpayer-critics was especially important during the early 1950s, as voices even within agriculture, notably Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, began to speak of rolling back federal support of farmers.\textsuperscript{50} Benson’s desire to roll back parity guarantees for farmers was part of a larger skepticism about government support of agriculture in an era of abundance. Gallup

\textsuperscript{48} Idem.
polling found Americans in 1952 split on the issue of farm aid. Those who opposed subsidies reasoned, as one Utah housewife, that farm “incomes should not be kept up any more than others—it’s unfair to consumers.” Media portraits of the farm program were unlikely to tip the balance of opinion in farmers’ favor. In 1955 article entitled “The Country Slickers Take Us Again,” Harpers magazine launched an all-out rhetorical attack against “our pampered tyrant, the American farmer.” The article told urban Americans to brace themselves for the political pandering that would ensue in the year ahead. The farmer, the article began, “is about to get his boots licked again by both political parties.” The crux of the case against the farmer centered on the long-term taxpayer financing of “the dole.” “When any hog keeps his jowls in the trough long enough, he gets to thinking he owns the trough.”

The apparent economic success of some farmers confirmed suspicions of the agricultural “dole”—a reversal of early twentieth-century discourse of urban dependency and decay. In 1955, Cold War competition had made the Iowa farm a symbolic point of pride for the United States. When twelve Soviet agricultural officials toured hog and corn farms in Iowa, they were, at least by one account, in search of “the secret of how this combination works.” The New York Times reported a story of fellowship and goodwill between the Des Moiners and the Soviets—most of whom hailed from the Ukraine, “Russia’s closest approximation of Iowa.” While Iowans’ eyes may have been set on the “Soviet Russians” in their midst, the Times reporter was transfixed by the shiny tractors and new farm equipment. In the reporter’s words, “the ordinary Iowa farmer…has a minimum of two new cars and they are usually brand-new Buicks or Oldsmobiles or

51 “Public Found Divided on Farm Subsidy,” Los Angeles Times, 28 August 1953.
Cadillacs.” Iowa was the anti-Potemkin village. Urban newspapermen argued that farmer success was too good to be true, not because it was fake, but because it was real—and that taxpayers kept farmers “living in clover and Cadillacs.”

In light of such coverage, farmers and farm organizations argued that the federal farm program had been the victim of “bad publicity”—and that they were themselves the victims of social misunderstanding. Tobacco farmers were the most dependent on rigid farm policy in the form of strict acreage restriction and high price supports. They had the most to lose from an urban-centered, consumer revolt against the farm program. Fortunately they had a patron in North Carolina representative and House Committee on Agriculture Chairman Harold Cooley. Cooley had both an historic and an ongoing investment in fighting for corporatist agriculture. An important architect of the New Deal-initiated allotment system, he waged a vehement battle against the efforts of Republican Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson to overhaul the national farm program throughout the 1950s.

Cooley proposed a national “Farm-City Week” in the summer of 1955 as a palliative to taxpayer protest of the farm program. Cooley wanted farmers to loudly and visibly portray themselves in the best light possible—emphasizing traditions of self-reliance, the grueling labor regime of the farm, and the stability of the farm family. He

53 The reporter quoted, Harrison Salisbury, was the New York Times longtime Russian affairs correspondent most famous for reporting on the “Kitchen Debate” between Nixon and Kruschev a few years later. His observations of the Iowa farm visit were quoted by Fischer, the editor of Harper’s, in the “Country Slickers” article.

54 As historian David Freund has shown, white Americans living in cities and suburbs were also receiving federal subsidy, particularly from the generous mortgage terms of the Federal Housing Authority. The particular genius of the FHA, Freund contends, was that it successfully branded its massive interventions into the market for credit as a “free market” narrative. David P. Freund, “Marketing the Free Market: state Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America,” in The New Suburban History, eds. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11-33.
envisioned Farm-City Week “celebrations” as an opportunity for farmers to carve a folksy, evocative image of agrarian life out of their complex relationship with government—the alphabet soup of agencies at their side, the calculation of parity, the terms of federally-sponsored crop insurance and commodity storage. Just a few weeks before he introduced “Farm-City” legislation in the House, Cooley gave the keynote address at the annual meeting of a national fertilizer trade association at the Greenbrier Resort. There, he spoke of his feeling that farmers had for too long talked among themselves as cloistered meetings. The time for internal organization had passed. Farmers “know their own problems, but it is the city consumer that does not understand what we are trying to do?” Cooley’s use of the inclusive plural pronoun “we” is significant. Not only was the North Carolina representative a landowner, but he had helped to secure the legislation now under fire from a hostile Secretary of Agriculture, and a population that perhaps saw its own interests opposed to policies that encouraged supply restriction. Most importantly, Cooley was drawing a circle of interest around those who worked on the business side of agriculture, yoking their fates to those of the farmer. In Cooley’s account, what a “City-Consumer” knew about the price support system would have been “something in the paper which indicates that it is something unholy and un-American.” Cooley’s invention of the “City-Consumer” as a figure ignorantly opposed to farm policy speaks to the way in which changing work regimes, demography, and consumption patterns threatened farmers, but also reinforced identities based upon geography. The “City-Consumer” and the “farmer” were spoken of as static entities. Indeed, the kind of public relations program that Cooley advocated necessitated that the farmer appear fixed, immutable, and picturesque so that he could be rendered, packaged and sold to an equally
legible and predictable urban consumer. Farmers had been laggard in getting their message across, resulting in an informational “vacuum” within the American media. “The result is many people seldom hear of agriculture except in connection with unpleasant—or seemingly unpleasant—events,” Cooley lamented. Public relations for agriculture was preemptive storytelling: establishing relationships with non-farm media; supplying newspapers, magazines, and writers with pro-farmer facts (“the truth”); and capitalizing on current events to explain the “essentiality of Agriculture.”

Several weeks later, Cooley’s vision of a “positive public relations program for farmers” was on the road to legislative fruition. At Congressional hearings in support of a new holiday called “Farm-City Week” Cooley and Kansas Congressman Clifford Hope spoke impassionedly, almost aggressively, of the need for social redress for farmers—not through “parity” but through “understanding.” Hope, who sponsored a similar Farm-City Week resolution, argued that urban-dwellers merely needed to be educated—perhaps with information derived and furnished through farmer-financed and supported institutions, perhaps through Nickels for Know-How—in order to accept farmers’ assertions of autonomy over agriculture policy. The discourse of “education” and “understanding” for the farmer served to mystify the farm program’s redistribution of resources from urban to rural areas. For Hope, this discursive sleight-of-hand was precisely the point. The demographic shift off the farm following the Second World War had “diminished farmers’ influence over national policies that affect their business.”

By bolstering the image of farming just as the practices of farming were receding in

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55 Harold Cooley, “A Positive Public Relations Program for Farmers,” 15 June 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
importance in American life, Farm-City Week valorized agriculture’s marginalization, protecting farmers like an endangered species. The rhetoric of dichotomy—farm-city, producer-consumer, rural-urban—suggested that farmers, though numerically very small, were entitled to just as much (and perhaps more) political consideration.

Harold Cooley gave legislative shape to this dream of “public relations for agriculture.” He advanced a joint resolution before congress designating the last week in October as Farm-City Week “in recognition of the contribution American farm families have made to our civilization.” This was not a straightforward celebration of the American cornucopia. Rather, the week was cordoned off in reverence to the farm in order to correct urban misconceptions—“to promote better public understanding of the needs, problems, and opportunities of our country’s agriculture and farm people.”

Advocates of the new holiday emphasized agriculture’s stagnation relative to other economic sectors, reinforcing a sense of siege and competition among rural people. “Agriculture is the one segment of our economy and our society that in recent years has declined in income and purchasing power while other segments are experiencing the greatest prosperity in all the history of our Nation,” Hope testified before the House Judiciary Committee. Despite repeated references in the plural possessive—“our economy” “our society,” “our Nation”—the congressman’s statement was predicated on a vision of rural life existing apart from national trends.

By Eisenhower’s presidential proclamation, the last week in October was observed as Farm-City Week. Eisenhower mobilized the Department of Agriculture, land grant colleges, extension service, and state service agencies into cooperative action with farm organizations, civic organizations and businesses. Sponsoring congressmen hoped that Farm-City Week activities would include “public meetings, discussions, exhibits, pageants, and press, radio and television features, with a special emphasis on notable achievements by rural groups and individuals.” Like other contemporary efforts at consensus-construction, Farm-City Week promised national togetherness by emphasizing uncontroversial, heartwarming aspects of particular livelihoods. Or, in the words of the legislation, Farm-City activities were intended to promote “all-around enrichment of American country living through adequate cultural, spiritual, educational, recreational, and health facilities for both rural youth and rural adults.” A professionally coordinated, federally sanctioned Farm-City Week portrayed farmers as civic and land stewards in their own right, but also as integral to the improvement in living standards that urban Americans could now take for granted. For example, as part of Farm-City week festivities, the USDA displayed a poster in New York’s busy Pennsylvania Station promoting agriculture’s recent accomplishments. The poster illustrated in dollars and cents (and oranges and milk) the relationship between farm productivity and the

58 Every president since Eisenhower has marked Farm-City Week. The “holiday” itself was moved from the last week in October to the week of Thanksgiving in 1957. President Barack Obama did not proclaim a Farm-City Week in 2012, but his 2011 Proclamation fused midcentury paeans to farm-life with administration priorities on family health. “As our urban centers continue to grow, we look to our fields and ranches to supply our markets and families with fresh, healthy food.” Barack Obama, “Presidential Proclamation—National Farm City Week 2011,” 18 November 2011. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/18/presidential-proclamation-national-farm-city-week-2011.
59 84 H.J.Res. 317; 84 H.J.Res. 318.
60 Idem.
pocketbook. Thirty years before, an hour’s take-home pay would have purchased a dozen oranges, 3.5 quarts of milk, or 5.5 loaves of bread. In 1955, by contrast, it could get three dozen oranges, 7 quarts of milk, or 10 loaves of bread. New York’s Commissioner of Markets believed that the display highlighted that “our pay check today does buy more and better food.” Yet this comment also sounded an ambiguous note, reinforcing the pocketbook as the ultimate adjudicator of farm policy.

Just as they built the “American way,” so too did civic associations build a narrative of consensus around farming. In so doing, coordinated voluntarism became a part of the “farmer’s story”—adding depth to farmers moral claims upon the polity. Kiwanis International took the lead in “observance” of the new holiday as its first “coordinating agent.” Kiwanis, which was headquartered in Chicago at the time, made sense as a facilitator for rural-urban relations. The group’s men’s-only, federated structure brought its 4,000 local clubs into contact with farm organizations like the Farm Bureau, which were similarly decentralized and patriarchic. Kiwanis helped coordinate “day on the farm” programs for city folk and “week-end exchanges between young people of farms and cities.” As a national organization, Kiwanis could also attract the attention of the largest businesses in the nation—particularly Midwest-based firms with agricultural interests. Sears Roebuck, General Electric, International Harvester, and the Association of American Railroads sponsored radio, television, and print campaigns for the week’s observance.

The “farmer’s story” got told through decentralized networks that rested on white business leadership. In Chicago’s posh, mahogany-interiored Drake Hotel, tire magnate

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Raymond Firestone called for a more “sympathetic” understanding of agriculture. Speaking before an audience of Kiwanis members at the organization’s national convention, Firestone was vague on what a sympathetic narrative might look like—what policies, politicians and organizations gave shape to the farmer’s story. Deliberate vagueness was a good strategy. Business historian Richard Tedlow has pointed out that since its inception in the early twentieth century, public relations has worked to humanize its business-clientele by emphasizing social harmony—portraying the client’s profit-oriented motives as synonymous with broad, uncontroversial social goods like democracy, community, and comfort.\(^6\) For cultural historian Roland Marchand, advertising in the twentieth century served as a kind of social and individual therapy, promising complete need fulfillment, while also “deny[ing] the actual processes of production.”\(^6\) Agriculture—the white farm family, the dawn-till-dusk labor routine that seemed more organically connected to nature and history, the smell of sweated labor—was the product advertised for urban consumption. Farm-City Week’s essay contests, farm tours, ladies’ luncheons, proclamations of “interdependence”\(^6\) and “sympathy”\(^6\) changed the terms of the public conversation about agriculture policy away from pocketbook politics and toward the preservation of a way of life.

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\(^6\) Idem.
Cooley hoped that these efforts at [agri]cultural diplomacy would help “set the record straight” about farming in America. The congressman’s voluminous papers take a decidedly public turn during the 1950s. Cooley’s correspondence and legislative concerns during the 1930s and 1940s centered largely around questions of primary and daily concern to his farmer-constituents: quota revisions, parity levels, the installation of tobacco inspectors at certain auction markets. But by the early 1950s, he had turned some of his attentions outward—defending his earlier legislative achievements against “those who don’t bother to learn the facts.” Cooley tried to “set the American public right” on “the marketing of commodities,” “the workings of the parity system,” and “the actual costs of food as compared to previous years” by inserting lengthy comments and statistical tables into the Congressional Record. Few Americans were likely scouring the Record for Cooley’s remarks, but farm organizations were. Flake Shaw, the president of the North Carolina Farm Bureau, informed the congressman—“Harold,” as the two were on a first-name basis—that his statement had been read by agricultural leaders in every state as portions were reprinted in the Farm Bureau’s national News Letter. Through Farm Bureau channels, Cooley helped develop a broad vocabulary of umbrage. “ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FARMERS ASK ABOUT FARM BUREAU,” a pocket-sized pamphlet intended to give Tar Heel farmers confidence in their organizational proselytization, exemplified this tense stance. “Agriculture has many problems today,” the section under the “WHY FARM BUREAU?” tab read. “Many of these

66 See Folder 254 “Tobacco Price Ceiling Opposition,” Box 7; Folder 260 “Speech File” for tobacco inspection, Box 7; Folder 605 “Tobacco Quota Extension,” Box 14, Cooley Papers, SHC.  
67 Farm Bureau News Letter Clipping, 26 November 1951, Folder 1362, Box 33, Cooley Papers, SHC.  
68 Idem.  
69 “R. Flake Shaw to Harold Cooley,” 26 November 1951, Folder 1362, Box 33, Cooley Papers, SHC.
problems…are problems of the industry as a whole and require action on the part of a united agriculture.” The point wasn’t to recruit farmers as members out of trans-continental rural solidarity. The point was for farmers to get theirs. “In order that farmers may receive their fair share of the Nation’s income, their rightful portion of the consumer’s dollar, and be represented fairly and adequately on matters of legislation…they must have their own nation-wide business organization.”

While Farm-City Week was described in the rhetoric of understanding and interdependence, its existence reflected postwar economic fracture as union membership rose, and businesses, following a trend toward conglomeration, also grew in scale and scope. “We realize the fact that this committee might be reluctant to declare one day for this purpose or for that purpose,” Cooley declared at Farm-City Week hearings in the House. “But the fact remains that throughout the years, labor has had its day.” Farm-City Week was necessary precisely because agriculture was not sharing in the “American Way” forged by the politics of consensus. “Agriculture is the one segment of our economy and our society that in recent years has declined in income and purchasing power while other segments are experiencing the greatest prosperity in all the history of our Nation,” Congressman Hope declared at Farm-City Week hearings.

Cooley’s advocacy of a public relations program for agriculture was an attempt to use the

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70 “Answers to Questions Farmers Ask About Farm Bureau,” ca. 1955, Folder 17, Box 18, North Carolina Farm Bureau Records (hereafter NCFB Records), NCSU.
74 Remarks of Clifford Hope, Ibid.
tools of consensus to advance a particular sectoral and geographic interest. Or, as the North Carolina Farm Bureau put it, slogan-like, on the front of its membership literature during the 1950s: “All other groups are organized/Farmers need to be organized.”

Inside the promotional pamphlet, the organization enumerated its best arguments for membership, nearly all of which emphasized the need to reclaim policy control from other groups. “We farmers,” the pamphlet announced, “can write our own Farm Program or let other groups write it for us.” This was a particularly dangerous proposition when farmers, who “feed and clothe the world,” are scorned, and “not fully recognized by other groups.” At stake was nothing less than the policies that had lifted North Carolina farmers out of the great depression. Tar Heel farmers were implored to “Remember the 1930s” when considering whether or not they “know more about a Farm Program than those who don’t farm.”

A return to the language, however pointed, of voluntary coordination, organization, and education, echoes Herbert Hoover’s vision for associational life in the 1920s. Cooley stressed the importance of the farmer “joining whole-heartedly in their local civic groups and activities.” Unlike Hoover, whose rhetoric sought to minimize the amount of government intervention necessary to produce the “associationalist state,” Cooley did not eschew the role of government. Indeed, Cooley wanted greater numbers of businesses to realize that their own prosperity depended on the government farm program. “After all, their customers’ problem is their problem,” he reasoned, “and farmers are their customers.”

Farmers were also their conduit. They were a part of

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75 “You Ought to Join the Farm Bureau,” ca. 1955, Folder 17, Box 18, NCFB Records, NCSU.  
76 Idem.  
77 Idem.
government—administering policies that they advised on and ratified. As businesses and trade associations (like the Plant Food Institute) came to understand farmers as political allies, these large organizations increasingly became stakeholders in agricultural corporatism, defying, in some instances, the postwar business ethic of “free-enterprise.” Kim Phillips-Fein has recently argued that after the Second World War, businesses deliberately sought to “undo the system of unions, federal social welfare programs, and government regulation of the economy that came into existence after the Great Depression.”78 Business opposition to New Deal-era policies was thus at the heart of the modern conservative movement. But businesses also built upon New Deal economic arrangements, particularly as a more incorporated agricultural sector—farm organizations, land grant colleges, and the USDA itself—partnered with civic associations and large businesses to sell the story of agriculture to the public. The language of liberalism and conservatism is perhaps inappropriate to assess an effort like Farm-City Week or Nickels for Know-How. Farmers felt that they needed to get “their story out” because New Deal-initiated agriculture, labor, and wage policies made them visible to each other, and to consumers. A congressman like Cooley, representing a commodity like tobacco, knew well how government policy could create prosperity for his constituents. Having created the tobacco belt’s prosperity by embedding farmers into the policy process, Cooley was also aware of how dangerous the public could be. After all, he had helped to author the crucial revision to the federal tobacco program that secured financing through general appropriations (taxes) after the processing tax on tobacco manufacturers had been ruled unconstitutional. Corporatist economic

arrangements were premised upon a harmonious vision of the economy, and, indeed, of the nation. It was crucial, therefore, that tobacco farmers sell *themselves* as surely as their flue-cured.

**III. To unite Agriculture, and give all agricultural groups something to be for**

But what story would the farmer sell? The structures of tobacco politics, economics, and promotion had yoked farmers together, allowing them to identify threats to their livelihood: farm labor shortages, organized Labor demands, public criticism of agricultural price supports, medical and epidemiological evidence linking cancer and cigarettes. But what was worth saving from these existential threats? What moral qualities of farm life were highlighted by the unwelcome sunshine of public scrutiny? These questions gnawed at Harold Cooley as he rolled out his vision for Farm-City Week. In inviting farmers and rural businessmen to build a “public relations for agriculture,” Cooley sought to “make sure the majority at least understands us, and preferably, likes us.” The likeability of farmers was evident enough to the businessmen at the Tobacco Institute who came to see tobacco growers as morally powerful lobbyists. When Cooley said “agriculture” he wanted Americans to think of small, human-scale family farms; he took it for granted the whiteness of the families imagined to own them. This fictive farm image had a clear partisan upshot: the North Carolina congressman opposed Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson’s policies, which encouraged mechanization and farm consolidation. Cooley’s fight for high parity prices

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79 “A Positive Public Relations Program for Farmers,” 15 June 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.

80 “An Invitation to help build PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE,” ca. 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
and rigid supply control only made sense in a world in which market imperatives—heavy mechanization, high capitalization, farm incorporation—were secondary to the moral, democratic, and social meaning of farms. Small-scale and barely-mechanized tobacco farms could ideally project Cooley’s social vision, carving out a place for unabashed government interventions into agricultural markets.

Without reference to Jefferson, Cooley and tobacco farmers in North Carolina articulated an ironic agrarianism: the federal tobacco program produced smallholder democracy; smallholder democracy was socially valuable and thus worthy of federal protection. In 1954, Benson changed the regulations governing the election of committeemen to County and Community Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) boards. Tobacco farmers particularly opposed the introduction of a regulation limiting the number of consecutive terms a committeeman could serve. Angry letters, evidently penned by group at farm meetings across the tobacco belt, poured in to Cooley’s office. Farmers’ arguments evinced pride in their participation in the federal tobacco program; comfort with elitism and hierarchy; and umbrage at the Secretary’s usurpation of what they believed to be their own authority—the right to run the tobacco program as they saw fit. Longtime leaders were the best men to lead. “We need men with experience,” one telegram from a former county Farm Bureau president read. “Since when has it become necessary for a major department head to dispense with the democratic process of electing men of their choice to administer farm programs under which they must live and make a living,” a group of farmers asked. Farmer

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82 The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) service was the USDA agency charged with running farm programs for the major commodity groups. Like its successor agency, the Farm Service agency (created in 1994), the ASC operated with farmer-administrators serving on local and county committees.
administration of the tobacco program relied on social hierarchy—the continual re-election of the same well-organized, elite farmers to governing bodies; but it was also democratic. The Secretary of Agriculture’s decision ran “contrary to our Democratic way of life.”

This pride in program governance, pride in “farmer democracy,” was reinforced by the small scale of tobacco enterprises. Again, the Secretary of Agriculture’s proposals to change the farm program crystallized tobacco growers’ self-conception. While Benson was able to singlehandedly change USDA regulations over committee elections, he was unsuccessful at overcoming congressional opposition (spearheaded by House Agriculture Chairman Cooley) at reductions for tobacco’s high price supports. For Cooley and tobacco farmers, public relations for agriculture meant shifting the discourse away from taxpayer-financed subsidies and toward a broad social recognition of American bounty. “The security of abundance has never been put across to our people,” Cooley lamented. Housewives, of course, were happy with a full pantry, taking for granted the “better food and reasonable prices” made possible by the “efficiency of farmers.” But housewives had also been brainwashed—perhaps by hostile media coverage—into thinking that farm surplus (held by the government at taxpayer expense) was “evil.” Cooley used the Cold War discourse of consumer abundance to justify the farm program’s taxpayer-financing of producer surplus. “We should see that America gives thanks for the fact that we are 5 percent over our goals instead of 5 or 15 or 20 percent under—as is the case in most of

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83 For scores of angry letters to Cooley sent in late June and July 1954, see Folder 1743, Box 40, Cooley Papers, SHC.
84 Harold Cooley, “A Positive Public Relations Program for Farmers,” 15 June 1955. Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
the world.”85 A positive public relations program for farmers would refute what the editors of Harper’s called “getting nicked twice”—paying for the farm program in taxes and in the higher prices for food at the checkout counter.86

For Cooley and other agricultural boosters, the farmer made possible the “good life of for every American family and each member of it.” In the context of the Cold War, the discourse of consumer choice could easily slip into a veneration of abundance more generally. “The science, the flavor, the romance of food” could serve as a comfortable inoculation against dollars-and-cents evaluation of farm policy.87 Cooley wanted to rescue “food from its present ‘residual expense’ category” in the household budget—what families buy “with the money they have left over after making the payment on the mortgage, the car, the television set, the gas company, and the tax man.” In so doing, public relations could help American consumers raise their estimation of food more generally, making the cost of the farm program appear a good deal. To explain agriculture as a social investment farmers needed good relations with major newspapers and community groups, public relations personnel at major American industries, and in-house advertising at the USDA. Through such “well-tested public relations tools,” a farm program intended to curtail quantity (but sometimes inadvertently producing expensive farm surpluses) could be portrayed as a social investment in quality.88

Cooley recognized that a government program that redistributed wealth from cities to farmers, and then charged consumers a higher price at checkout could not be

85 Harold Cooley, “A Positive Public Relations Program for Farmers,” 15 June 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
87 Harold Cooley, “A Positive Public Relations Program for Farmers,” 15 June 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
88 Idem.
justified under the pocketbook paradigm. And so he sought to explain the farm program as a different kind of good—not something that should be considered alongside a TV or a Frigidaire. By tweaking the terms with which farm policy was discussed, Cooley tried to delegitimize consumerist arguments against the farm program. Public relations for agriculture meant creating the singular right of farmers to express an opinion on matters relating to farming. “Farmer-controlled agriculture,” was not, as some critics charged, a step down a slippery slope of “regimentation;” nor was it the product of a “rural racket,” enabling farmers to “get too much for the food and fiber they produce.”89 Farmer-democracy, the public relations gloss on the federal farm program, “simply provides machinery for farmers by their own elections to do exactly what every well-managed industry does, namely: adjust production to market requirements.”90 The farmer’s desire to “maintain a reasonable price” through the farm program was not incompatible with the goals of a consumer society as “the consumers’ greatest ability to purchase food as occurred during the years of the development of the farm program.”91 At its inception, a public relations program for agriculture sought to portray government-protected farm life as a social value, a decentralized political expedient, and an unobtrusive corrective to the vagaries of agricultural markets.

These moral, political, and economic virtues were reflected in the promotional literature of the North Carolina Farm Bureau. Beginning in 1953, the Resolutions of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation included an expanded plank on “Public Relations” in which the organization proclaimed itself the steward of “better

89 Harold Cooley, “The Real Peril to the Farm Program,” ca. 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
90 Idem.
91 Idem.
understanding and cooperation between the decreasing rural and increasing urban population of our country.”

The organization’s plank on “Community Improvement” provides further clues about what kind of rural life Farm Bureau members wanted urban Americans to understand. “Recognizing that an attractive, cooperative community adds to dignity and contentment in rural living,” the Farm Bureau urged its members to “have attractive mail boxes with the owner’s name in large letters either on the mail box or a sign under the mail box;” “actively promote and participate in country fairs” in which “individual farm exhibits” were to be highlighted by the “Commissioner of Agriculture” and the “N.C. Board of Agriculture”; “cooperate in establishing community centers;” and “participate in movements to beautiful rural churches and cemeteries.”

Behind the fussy tone was a deep veneration for private property, and the expectation that the government work on behalf of private property holders—especially farm owners. The fact that the federal government created a new kind of private property through the tobacco quota was less important than the moral values implied by property itself. Through responsible community caretaking—the construction of recreational facilities, the tending of churches and cemeteries—propertied farmers proved just how entitled they were to write their own farm policies.

Race was central to the vision of (state-supported) republican agrarianism. In the 1950s, an aggressively pro-white, patriarchal vision of the land was not a public relations

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92 “Resolutions Adopted at 18th Annual Convention, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Raleigh, N.C., November 16, 1953,” Folder 2, Box 16, NCFB Records, NCSU.

93 “Resolutions Adopted at the 19th Annual Convention, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Asheville, N.C., November 24, 1954,” Folder 2, Box 16, NCFB Records, NCSU.
“problem.” It was foundational to the values requiring social and economic protection through the farm program itself. The NCFB strenuously opposed social policy that could benefit black Americans, even if such policies were consistent with other planks in the NCFB platform. For instance, in 1956 the Farm Bureau decried North Carolina’s reputation for low educational attainment, and demanded an expansion of government interventions designed to “provide for a uniform educational system” between rural and urban areas. These included an increase in starting salary for teachers, expansion of busing services, and the hiring of more teachers to alleviate the “teacher load.” By 1959, the language of the educational recommendations suggested a developing racial nuance to the Farm Bureau’s policy of school spending. Just as the Farm Bureau encouraged private sphere behavior that suggested nuclear family stability and respectability (church attendance, home upkeep), so too did its expanding educational policies reinforce the primacy of the family, highlighting the “responsibility of parents for student guidance.” The following year, as “all deliberate speed” began to reach North Carolina (through the consolidation of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district), the Farm Bureau affirmed a plank on “States Rights,” and educational hyper-localism: “the control, administration, and financing of our public school system must remain identified with the smallest unit of government capable of satisfactory performance.”

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94 Indeed, for nearly the entirety of the USDA’s history, racism and misogyny have not been perceived as problems in need of institutional address. See Pete Daniel’s recent *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2013).
95 “North Carolina Policies and Recommendations to the American Farm Bureau Federation, Charlotte, North Carolina, November 21, 1956,” Folder 3, Box 16, NCFB Records, NCSU.
96 1959 Policies, Resolutions, and Recommendations: North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Greensboro, N.C.,” Folder 3, Box 16, NCFB Records, NCSU.
97 Idem.
The Farm Bureau supported a welfare state for rural white people even as it opposed the “steady expansion in welfare expenditures and the steady increase in the numbers of persons on relief rolls.” This position was built into agricultural administration. Indeed, tobacco farmers’ opposition to term-limits on committeemen reflected the high degree of trust and comfort that many farmers felt within the tobacco belt’s hierarchies. A positive vision for agriculture rested on very detailed and specific ways that ideal farmers should relate to the government, property, homes, families, and civic associations. By law and custom, these avenues for proving title to a Jeffersonian inheritance were foreclosed to black farmers.

Racial hierarchy was so constitutive of the “positive” vision of farming in America that when it surfaced it barely received mention in the mainstream press. In May 1951, Cooley served as the keynote speaker at an awards ceremony for USDA employees. Before a crowd of 4,000 black and white agricultural officials—the USDA, and particularly the extension service was still organized along Jim Crow lines—Cooley joked repeatedly about “nigger preachers” and “nigger tenants,” occasioning a walkout by hundreds of African Americans in attendance. Citing his well known “record of friendship to Negroes,” Cooley claimed that he meant no harm. “I don’t care if I did say it, either inadvertently or intentionally…. Any Negro who took exception is


Cooley’s lack of perturbation, if not his use of the word itself, was truly unremarkable. Major newspapers covered neither the event nor the fallout from the congressman’s use of the epithet. This episode highlights the extent to which white male paternalism was built into the culture of the USDA. Cooley’s remarks happened at an official USDA ceremony in which African American agricultural officials, both male and female, were receiving awards. The “farmer’s side of the story” began with white male entitlement to property, and was narrated through an institution (the USDA) comfortable with racial hierarchy.

A positive public relations program for agriculture thus affirmed the family-owned farm unit, normatively envisioned as white, churchgoing, community-supporting, and part of farm program administration. Tobacco farmers, as evidenced by their strenuous support of high price supports and rigid production control, did not oppose the heavy hand of government into commodity markets or the soft touch of the state in rural life. Indeed public relations for agriculture, though its operations and effect, was intended keep political power for agriculture close to the state-supported farmers themselves. “We want nobody dictating a farm to us,” Cooley said in a 1955 radio address. “But as we work out our own problems and policies, we need the understanding of people in the cities where votes are cast in Congress.”

The economic and moral elements of tobacco production were enabled by government-sponsored decentralization. Farmers were sensitive to those outside agriculture—urban-dwellers, city-based media, consumers—articulating an opinion on

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100 Idem. A handful of letters sent to the Congressman, presumably written by African-Americans (either present at the talk, or having read the coverage in the black media), reveal the depth of outrage at his comments.

101 Harold Cooley, “The Real Peril to the Farm Program,” ca. 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
matters relating to the farm. Public relations for agriculture sought to bolster the singular right of farmers – and nobody else – to articulate an opinion on agriculture policy. This vision of political entitlement was not anti-government, but it bristled at centralized authority geographically removed from rural life.

IV. Growing the Farmer: The Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee

By the late 1950s, tobacco farmers were feeling particularly misunderstood—farther than ever from new sources of political energy in cities and, increasingly, suburbs. Americans had grown tepid in support of the supply-restriction principles that had guided general farm policy since the New Deal. In the tobacco belt specifically, the vaunted quality of North Carolina flue-cured came in for intensive scrutiny by tobacco manufacturers (discussed in the previous chapter), as the stocks of crop under government loan were swelling at taxpayer expense (chapter 4). Most distressing of all—because it thwarted farmers’ efforts to seal and steer the dialogue about agriculture—public anxiety over the health consequences of smoking was on the rise. Since the mid-1930s, doctors and health researchers had harbored suspicions that cigarette smoking and lung cancer may have been more than incidentally related. During the late 1940s,

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102 One 1956 American National Election Survey revealed that 25% of Americans agreed with the statement, "If a farmer can’t sell things he raises at a profit, the government should buy them and limit the amount a farmer can produce." While 21% disagreed, and another 21% strongly disagreed; American National Election Study 1956 (Pre-Election), Sep, 1956. Retrieved Apr-19-2013 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Three years later, a Gallup Poll revealed that 50% of those surveyed believed that paying growers of basic commodities (cotton, corn, wheat and tobacco) to take land out of production was "a poor idea." While 35% saw this policy, which was federal agriculture policy as per the Agricultural Act of 1956, as "a good idea." Gallup Poll (AIPO), Dec, 1959. Retrieved Apr-19-2013 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

103 Allan Brandt, The Cigarette Century: the Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America (New York: Basic, 2007), 131; My understanding of mid-century notions of
doctors, medical statisticians, research hospitals, and non-profit associations (like the American Cancer Society) began the epidemiological inquiries that came to shape public discourse on smoking-and-health a decade later.

As political scientists have pointed out, diffuse, scattered organizations and interests are likeliest to come together when they feel that they have something to lose—something that they must defend.¹⁰⁴ The story of “big tobacco” has been foundational to how scholars have analyzed the political behavior of interest groups and businesses. These accounts have not, however, understood tobacco farmers and their institutional patrons, business allies, and efforts to relate their own story to the public as a constitutive element of “big tobacco.” But farmers’ earlier organizing campaigns—each referendum vote, each Farm-City celebration, each nickel for know-how, each assessment on their quote for tobacco promotion through Tobacco Associations—prepared them to establish the Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee—the growers’ wing of Big Tobacco.

In the summer of 1958, leaders from the tobacco-growing areas of North Carolina and Virginia came together to form yet another committee. Farmers’ problems weren’t coming from the soil or the sky. They were political. The constant drumbeat of news, bad news, surrounding the cigarette-cancer link was growing louder.¹⁰⁵ The previous year, the federal Public Health Service cited “increasing and consistent evidence” that “excessive”

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smoking was a cause of lung cancer. The 1957 statement by Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney was the strongest to date by the government on the subject.\textsuperscript{106} Seizing the anti-smoking momentum, the American Cancer Society released “To Smoke or not to Smoke?”, a leaflet distributed by the organization’s 3,000 nation-wide offices, at the very beginning of the year. This succinct summary of the latest research on smoking, lung cancer, and heart disease, concluded simply that, “those who smoke less are those who live longer.” Its details were more frightening: lung cancer mortality was ten times greater among cigarette smokers than non-smokers, and sixty times greater for two-pack-a-day smokers than those who never smoked. The Federal Trade Commission, frequently reluctant to regulate American businesses (especially the tobacco business), launched a series of talks with the major cigarette manufacturers, culminating in a suit against Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company for false advertising.\textsuperscript{107}

As the FTC inquiry would suggest, cigarette manufacturers were active in responding to public health concerns. One response by the industry to public fears was to build a new kind of cigarette, promoting filter-tipped cigarettes as a healthful alternative to standard or king sized smokes. This helped to buoy sales even as public anxiety over


smoking rose.\textsuperscript{108} The public scrutiny and industry response each posed a problem for farmers. Too much discussion about cigarettes made farmers vulnerable, opening a conversation on the “tobacco subsidy.” Suspicion surrounding the cigarette was an opening wedge for a debate on tobacco farmers’ least favorite topic: the federal tobacco program, or, as it was increasingly called (much to growers’ consternation), the tobacco subsidy.\textsuperscript{109} In redesigning the cigarette, the tobacco industry, for its part, also put pressure on farmers. Filter-tip cigarettes used less tobacco leaf than regular cigarettes;\textsuperscript{110} non-filter, king-sized cigarettes, which used the most tobacco of all, were also decreasing in popularity as Americans sought to mitigate the consequences of their habit.\textsuperscript{111} Farmers were caught in a triple bind that could leave them economically impoverished, politically hamstrung, and disempowered vis-à-vis the big tobacco companies: more Americans feared smoking, but continued to smoke cigarettes that had less flue-cured tobacco in them. To maintain their livelihoods in the short and long term, tobacco farmers needed to organize.

Farm leadership—prominent farmers, extension agents, Farm Bureau and Grange leaders—incorporated the Tobacco Growers Information Committee in North Carolina in November 1958. But the groundwork for the organization had been laid at least six months earlier. In a speech to the stockholders of the Flue Cured Tobacco Growers Stabilization Corporation, the cooperative responsible for administering the loan provisions of the federal tobacco program, RJ Reynolds President Bowman Gray urged

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{109} “End of Tobacco Subsidy Sought,” Washington Post, 17 July 1957.
\item \textsuperscript{110} In 1954, filter-tip cigarettes accounted for less than 10% of all cigarettes sold; by 1958, they were approximately half of the market. “Smokers Light of Cigarette Sales,” \textit{New York Times}, 6 January 1958.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Idem. See Appendix, Figure 6.1 for a graphical representation of the quantity of tobacco used in cigarettes during the twentieth century.
\end{enumerate}
strength through unity. “We are interdependent…we have a common goal and we must work together,” the executive told a farm audience that included many prominent figures in tobacco farm administration. Gray faulted growers and manufacturers for “too little communication between us,” but highlighted efforts recently initiated by growers to acknowledge the industry’s “common endeavor” through “the recent formation of the Tobacco Growers Information Committee.”112 Gray’s very early endorsement of the TGIC—it could hardly be called a group yet, since tobacco representatives had “formed” just weeks earlier—suggests strong tobacco company influence in the “growers”’ group. Indeed, the TGIC was probably the brainchild of the Tobacco Institute, itself a recently consolidated tobacco industry lobbying effort. Formed just months earlier, the Tobacco Institute “quickly emerged as one of Washington’s most powerful and effective political lobbies.”113 One of the Tobacco Institute’s “critical and aggressive approaches to managing its regulatory environment” came in the form of the farmer.114

The Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee cannot be explained as “astroturfing,” or industry manufacture of grassroots advocacy. Farmers really did support the organization, which was built from farm groups, and through the assiduous efforts of prominent tobacco leaders. Indeed, even before the Tobacco institute was formed, several tobacco men were already part of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC), the industry group dedicated to combating anti-smoking science created at the behest of Hill and Knowlton, the most influential public relations firm in

113 Brandt, Cigarette Century, 251.
114 The quotation is Brandt’s, though Brandt does not analyze the role of the farmer in the tobacco lobby. Idem.
the United States.\textsuperscript{115} For instance, at one confidential TIRC meeting, farm bureau representatives and burley tobacco growers sat shoulder to shoulder with industry lawyers, PR executives, and Clarence Cook Little, the infamous physician whose commitment to a genetic theory of cancer causation made him the industry’s favorite doctor.\textsuperscript{116}

The TGIC was formed to explicitly combat “so-called health-scare talk and excessive taxation”—joining the farmer’s historic fight against higher cigarette taxes (discussed in chapter three) to the contemporary issue of health. About thirty men, representing flue-cured and burley tobacco organizations, were present to found the new organization in Raleigh. Carl T. Hicks, the chairman of the North Carolina Farm Bureau’s tobacco advisory committee, was selected as chair. Hicks had been president of Stabilization since its inception in 1946, and owned a farm in Walstonburg, a tiny farming community halfway between North Carolina’s two largest marketing towns of Wilson and Greenville. His roots in the political economy of the tobacco belt stretched back to the New Deal when he was part of the delegation sent to Washington to work out the provisions of tobacco policy with AAA planners.\textsuperscript{117}

The prominence of member organizations was striking. Grower cooperatives in all tobacco-producing states—from Florida to Connecticut, Tennessee to Wisconsin—were early members, as were all Farm Bureaus and Granges from those same states.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{115} Hill and Knowlton’s clients at the time included the steel, oil, and aircraft industries. Brandt, \textit{Cigarette Century}, 166. See also, Miller, \textit{The Voice of Business}.


\textsuperscript{118} “Board of Directors and Endorsing Organizations of the Tobacco Growers Information Committee, Inc.” n.d., 1960, Uncategorized Binder Collection of TGIC Minutes, Tobacco Growers
Con Lanier, the fiery second in command at the AAA and co-founder of Tobacco Associates, signed the TGIC’s articles of incorporation; Jack Hutson, chief of the tobacco section of the AAA and founder of Tobacco Associates, was a frequent presence at TGIC meetings until his death in late 1963.119 And the TGIC drew upon even older organizing traditions in the tobacco belt. W.T. Joyner, the son of a founder of the old Tri-State Tobacco Growers Cooperative (discussed in chapter one) served as the organization’s general council.120 But men with more straightforward and active ties to government also participated in establishing the committee. A representative from the North Carolina Tobacco Advisory Council, a policymaking body connected to the state department of agriculture, was a mainstay at meetings, while a member of the federal Farm Credit Administration signed on to the board of directors.121 To be sure, these men did not demographically represent the vast majority of flue-cured tobacco growers. They were wealthier, whiter, and spent less time farming and more time running businesses. But in another sense, they literally represented thousands of farmers, serving on elected boards and running the organizations that farmers themselves funded. According to the organization’s proposed budget for 1960, Tobacco Associates, funded through grower-assessments on their tobacco acreage and on the federal tobacco program referendum

119 The tobacco lobby drew upon even older organizing traditions in the tobacco belt in defense of the cigarette. W.T. Joyner, the son of one of the founders of the old Tri-State Tobacco Growers Cooperative (discussed in chapter one), was part of the Tobacco Institute’s team of lawyers.
ballot, contributed an equal amount ($25,000) to the TGIC as did the manufacturer-funded Tobacco Institute.\textsuperscript{122}

Farmers and manufacturers financed the TGIC, and these two groups were represented in the organization’s twofold mission. The organization existed to mow down tobacco’s increasingly vocal opponents in a way that drew attention to the producers of the crop and not the cigarette;\textsuperscript{123} and to let farmers know that “punitive and discriminatory legislation” would soon hurt them if they did not take action.\textsuperscript{124} It was a lion-and-lamb strategy. With tobacco industry backing, farmers could tell the story of their family labor, the historic connection of the tobacco farmer to the nation’s founding, and their measly share of the cost of the cigarette. But they also had to fight.

The TGIC brought the public relations apparatus of big business to the dense personal networks of farm life in three ways: through the press, through local organizations, and through a full-time public relations director who extended a very glad-hand to tobacco elites. First, when it was conceived TGIC leadership had already identified a number of friendly press outlets influential in tobacco producing regions of the U.S. It monitored the content of these newspapers, television stations and radio

\textsuperscript{122} For the organization’s 1960-1961 budget of $52,000, $25,000 was to come from Tobacco Associates; $25,000 from the Tobacco Institute; and $2000 from unspecified member donations. “Tobacco Growers Information Committee, Inc. Proposed Budget, November 1, 1960-October 31, 1961,” TGIC Records, Duke Homestead.

\textsuperscript{123} The organization’s articles of incorporation define its objects and purposes as follows: "a) to promote a better understanding by the general public of the importance of tobacco and tobacco products in the national economy; b) to collect and disseminate to tobacco growers and others information relating to taxes or proposed taxes, whether federal, state or local, imposed on tobacco or tobacco products; c) to collect and disseminate to tobacco growers and others scientific and medical material relating to the use of tobacco or tobacco products; d) to collect and disseminate to tobacco growers and others information as to existing or proposed punitive or discriminatory legislation, whether federal, state or local against tobacco or tobacco products." “Articles of Incorporation of the Tobacco Growers Information Committee.” 13 November 1958. Council for Tobacco Research. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/1mw5aa00.

\textsuperscript{124} Idem.
shows, making sure that they were well supplied with pro-cigarette “facts” to counter the “opinions” of anti-cigarette “zealots.” At its founding, the TGIC received, by its own account, “strong support from the public-service media,” including not only farm-focused publications like *The Progressive Farmer* and *Farm and Ranch Magazine*, but also regional newspapers with an urban reach such as the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* and the Raleigh *News and Observer*. Secondly, the TGIC funneled information through the well-worn channels of farm meetings. The Committee was, after all, an organization comprised of organizations. And so, the TGIC sent local Granges, Farm Bureaus, warehouse associations, bankers, extension agents, and county committees materials prepared by Hill and Knowlton via the Tobacco institute. Public relations for growers relied on the already existing, state-supported organizations, information channels, and personnel hierarchies. But the TGIC as a private, corporate entity—founded with explicitly anti-tax, anti-public health goals—shrouded its own very statist mechanics in the resonant language of anti-governmental umbrage.

Before the ink was dry on the organization’s articles of incorporation, the TGIC had distributed 350,000 copies of a pocket-sized pamphlet entitled “A Call to Arms,” announcing its confrontational, anti-tax, pro-smoking strategy. Farm people noticed the TGIC’s splashy entrance into the nearly uncharted waters of agricultural public relations.

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125 Radio was a particularly important medium in tobacco-producing regions—not only because farmers were less likely to own televisions, but also because of Jesse Helms’ early popularity on the Raleigh-based Tobacco Radio Network. For an example of the industry emphasis on “facts” versus opinions, see: “Tobacco Growers Information Committee News.” August 1958. RJ Reynolds. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/lws23a00.

126 Idem.


The TGIC made a much more straightforward case to and for the tobacco farmer than any Farm-City Week or state fair ever could.

The TGIC newsletter was an engaging document. It was sent to Congressmen and member-organizations with regularity (four times per year), and written in snappy prose intended to frighten and embolden in equal measure. The newsletter presented a highly curated vision of the world outside the tobacco belt. Each newsletter began with a series of bulletin-style news items highlighting the threatened advances of “health-scare zealots,” and adverse “legislative action” against a commodity that had more than paid its dues to society. For every few news blurbs on the “terror campaign” waged by the American Cancer Society in its efforts to combat teenage smoking, the TGIC also ran items highlighting the importance of tobacco to the nation’s economy, history, and even in safeguarding political rights. For instance, the newsletter lamented the imposition of a 1959 tax on tobacco products in Virginia, “where our tobacco economy was born… with John Rolfe’s seed experiments at Jamestown… in search of milder variety” and where the crop “brought nearly 79 million dollars income to the State’s farmers.”¹²⁹ Farmers, in some sense, knew this information already, even if their dollar valuation of the crop was fuzzier, or their thoughts on the crop’s role in colonialism less poetic. But what the newsletter made explicit was the way in which a broader constellation of rights were threatened by any non-agricultural regulation of tobacco. And it did so in a way that resonated with farmers, particularly white farmers, and their sense of grievance at other social changes. In pursuing “an easy solution of [its] fiscal woes by exacting a tax tribute from a portion of [its] citizenry in order to defray the expenses of all government,” the

state of Virginia made martyrs out of tobacco farmers. This type of argument tapped into the longstanding resentment of farmers at other economic sectors benefitting at their own expense. And, perhaps equally urgent for southern whites clinging to the race privileges of Jim Crow, it ennobled the fight against tobacco regulation as another kind of civil rights struggle. As an economic and cultural minority, farmers too needed to protect themselves.

The USDA, farm organizations, land grant college officials, and media outlets helped to distribute hundreds of thousands of TGIC publications to tobacco-state residents.130 The TGIC helped to create a recursive loop of tobacco knowledge. It received information from state and private sources; repackaged that information as grist for the pro-cigarette cause; and redistributed the knowledge back to those same feeder institutions—farm organizations, departments of agriculture, bankers, and tobacco trade organizations. For instance, in one early publicity blitz, the organization published 80,000 brochures entitled “The First American Heritage,” which were tailor-made for Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina and Tennessee. The production of state-specific marketing materials deepened the connection between private and public tobacco interests. Virginia’s “First American Heritage” pamphlet, for example, devoted a significant proportion of text to enumerating the value of the American tobacco crop overall, the value of exports, the value of Virginia’s multiple tobacco varieties, and the value of the federal, state, county, and municipal taxes on tobacco products. The very end of the accordion-style pocket pamphlet proudly proclaimed its sources as: “the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, the Tobacco Tax Council, the Virginia Department of

130 Idem.
Agriculture and Commerce, Virginia Department of Labor, Virginia State Chamber of Commerce, Virginia State Ports Authority, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Department of Commerce, Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Treasury Department."\(^{131}\) The TGIC relied on the authority and prestige of state statics even as it sought to establish a parallel, trade-centered counterweight to the right of government to regulate tobacco.

This flurry of pro-cigarette propaganda was only possible through the dedication of a full-time public relations man. William H.W. Anderson had worked in media his entire adult life, first as a sports reporter than as information director for the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce.\(^{132}\) At the age of 41, he joined the TGIC upon its founding as its executive secretary and treasurer, a position he would hold until his retirement in the late 1970s. He was the organization’s man-on-the-ground, maintaining all correspondence, and cashing the checks that arrived to the organization’s Raleigh P.O. Box.\(^{133}\) Anderson considered himself a public relations professional. He was a member in several professional societies (including the National Association of Farm Broadcasters and the National Association of Broadcasters), and helped to increase the legitimacy and visibility of public relations among rural youth by maintaining ties with the Division of Agricultural Information at NC State.\(^{134}\)

A crucial part of Anderson’s job was to keep in close contact with tobacco executives and farm leadership, sometimes conveying, if not manufacturing, a sense of goodwill throughout industry supply chain. For instance, Anderson used a salesman’s touch when, in correspondence with tobacco executives, he conveyed his belief in the importance of the grassroots. Praising the wisdom of one Philip Morris executive, Anderson wrote, “you are so right in bearing down that all segments of the economy—especially the tobacco grower and his family—now must unite in an industry wide program.”\footnote{135 “William H.W. Anderson to James C. Bowling,” 5 November 1965. File—“Misc, Philip Morris,” Uncategorized File Cabinets. TGIC Records, Duke Homestead.} It was Anderson’s full-time job, in short, to make farmers and tobacco executives get along. Though many men in tobacco belt also desperately desired unity in defense of the cigarette (and all it stood for), their jobs were to advocate more narrowly on behalf of their membership—for tobacco promotion (in the case of Tobacco Associates), or for high price supports and strict acreage quotas (in the cases of the North Carolina Grange and the Farm Bureau).

By devoting all of his energies toward highlighting the common enemy of “zealots” and taxes, as well as downplaying areas of disagreement, Anderson created a more uniform stake in cigarettes for both farmers and industry.\footnote{136 For an example of the TGIC’s role in downplaying rancor, see its sponsorship of the Reduce Residues Now! Campaign, discussed in chapter 5. File—“RRN [Reduce Residues Now],” Uncategorized File Cabinets, TGIC Records, Duke Homestead. See Appendix, Figure 5.2.} In part, the TGIC did this by helping farm organizations to realize what could be gained from an explicit alliance with the tobacco industry. One example from Anderson’s 1958 correspondence with the North Carolina Grange makes the point explicit. When the TGIC was first getting off the ground, Anderson needed help in pinpointing addresses of farm men who could potentially be engaged on the group’s behalf. In the opening round of a volley of
letters, Anderson thanked Grange “Master” Harry Caldwell, with whom he was already on a first-name basis, for his “understanding” and “willingness to help in launching” the TGIC. “We need all the assistance possible in setting up communications to responsible farm leaders,” Anderson wrote. Specifically, Anderson wanted the “names and addresses of your current officers, board members, and tobacco committee members,” as well as Caldwell’s “suggestions concerning out contacting other Granges.”\(^{137}\) Caldwell sprang into action, expressing his grave concern to the Master of the Oregon State Grange over Oregon Senator Maureen Neuberger’s introduction of an anti-tobacco bill. “I presume that you work with Senator Neuberger on a very friendly basis,” Caldwell wrote. Without realizing that Senator Neuberger was a woman, Caldwell continued that the North Carolina grangers “respect [Neuberger] as an outstanding member of the United States Senate, and on the basis of comments made to me by our late Senator Scott, I feel sure that he is the type of person who would not want to take precipitate action on this or any other matter affecting the welfare of so many farm people.”\(^{138}\) This correspondence was forwarded to Anderson, who passed it along to RJ Reynolds President Bowman Gray. Appended to a carbon copy of Caldwell’s correspondence was an inter-office memo from Anderson, who was happy to report that the North Carolina Grange would be squarely on the side of the industry when it came for fighting for the cigarette. “While he has some reservations concerning frontal attacks on the zealots, [Caldwell] has pledged wholehearted support of his organization.” But the kind of support Caldwell planned to


offer ("a series of three…or more one-day national regional meetings for Masters and other top grange officials") came at a price, as Caldwell demanded financial support for his TGIC boosterism. The TGIC and the Grange came to constitute one another. The former sponsored talks and scholarships at Grange meetings and NC State, while organized farmers became the evocative but militant narrators of their own story.

Ironically, government-sponsored decentralization enabled the Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee to crystallize its anti-government position. The TGIC erased agricultural statecraft from the story of the commodity in America. The decentralized nature of the farm program and the historic importance of tobacco in America helped the TGIC to sharpen farmers’ vocabulary of besieged entitlement.

The Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee vindicated Congressman Harold Cooley’s earlier calls for “a positive public relations program for farmers.” With tobacco industry backing, farmers finally had their arsenal of “facts” and “truth” to supply to “the important writers, magazines, and newspapers, of the United States;” they finally had their “speakers bureau” and at least one “well qualified person ready to present…the true story about agriculture;” and, crucially, through the TGIC tobacco farmers found “some means of financing adequate institutional advertising to tell the agricultural stories which we will not be able to tell in any other way.”

140 The same story could be told of the North Carolina Farm Bureau, with whom Anderson also maintained close contact.
141 For TGIC role in facilitating Reynolds donation to NC State see File—"RJR Research," Uncategorized File Cabinets, TGIC Records, Duke Homestead.
142 Harold Cooley, “A Positive Public Relations Program for Farmers,” 15 June 1955, Folder 2119, Box 49, Cooley Papers, SHC.
143 Idem.
corporatist consensus. Beginning with the OPA, farmers sensed that their interests were not sufficiently embedded within government, that other groups were benefitting at their expense. This conflict appeared all the more fractious for the way it broke down along the lines of rural-urban, producer-consumer. And so Cooley and other leaders sought to ameliorate this social conflict through highly interest-laden education—or, in other words, through public relations. Public relations for agriculture worked by building off of the organizational arrangements inaugurated by the New Deal. The TGIC built upon the momentum already brewing in farm country for public relations—momentum embodied in Farm-City Week, and Nickels for Know-How.

The aims of pro-cigarette lobbying may appear, at first blush, frankly anti-regulatory. The TGIC’s major goals were, after all, to oppose cigarette taxes and health regulation. But peering into the unopened files of the TGIC also enlivens us to a new understanding of postwar political economy. Although the TGIC was formed at the behest of the major tobacco companies, it only worked by building upon the grassroots, which in the American tobacco belt, meant working through organizations and individuals that operated with public and private authority. The Tobacco Growers Information Committee worked by thickening the ties of the tobacco nexus, and these ties ran right through state institutions and back to the farm.
Conclusion:  
The Persistence of Commodity Corporatism

Tobacco growers greeted the Surgeon General’s *Report on Smoking and Health* with a carefully orchestrated shrug. The *Report*, an exhaustive, year-long meta-analysis of 8,000 scientific studies on the relationship between tobacco and disease, came as no surprise to the tobacco industry. The Tobacco Institute, the lobby group and partial patron of the Tobacco Growers’ Information Committee, had after all been given veto power over the composition of the scientific advisory panel charged with making recommendations to Surgeon General Luther Terry.¹ The Rocky Mount (N.C.) *Telegram* reported that “there appeared to be little surprise” in tobacco country when the report was released on January 11, 1964.² The *Robesonian*, published out of Lumberton, North Carolina, on the southernmost part of the eastern coastal plain, described the *Report* as “full of no surprises,” and even expressed confidence in the industry’s resilience due to the tripartite investment in tobacco on the part of farmers, manufacturers and the government. “The federal government and most states have a stake in tobacco sales…farmers have a tobacco control program which is more nearly self-sustaining than most,” hence “the tobacco industry is not in a highly vulnerable position.”³

One hundred miles north along the recently-completed I-95, the Wilson *Daily Times* interviewed an extension agent, a warehouseman, and the president of Tobacco Associates to conclude that “the report is

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not going to disturb the tobacco program, not in the least.” Referring to the charges launched against the cigarette for much of the product’s history, the Daily Times concluded that “even though people know certain things are not good for them, they do not stop, not if what they are doing gives some type of pleasure or satisfaction.” Legally empowered to respond to pleasure-seeking consumers, “Wilson county farmers are going about the business of making another good crop of tobacco.”

That isn’t to suggest farmers weren’t distressed about the overall health of the federal tobacco program. But the gravest threat facing tobacco country was not the anti-tobacco “zealotry” of the Surgeon General or Senator Maureen Neuberger or the potential of FTC regulation on the cigarette carton. It was farmers themselves—specifically, their repeated overproduction of leaf. Overproduction cost taxpayers money because the Flue-Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corporation had to purchase excess tobacco at auction at the USDA-mandated government price. The taxpayer claim upon tobacco—the pocketbook politics of the federal tobacco problem—was a particular problem during a moment of intensifying public scrutiny of the cigarette. To nip this potential source of scrutiny in the bud—lest taxpayers assert themselves as stakeholders in the tobacco economy—farmers had to find a structural solution to the overproduction problem.

In 1965, after years of mounting tobacco stocks caused by intensive cultivation with chemicals like MH-30, congress moved to amend the basis of tobacco control. Rather than holding quota based on the historic base acreage alone, farmers were assigned a poundage quota and an acreage allotment. Farmers were generally able to produce the maximum legally marketable amount of leaf on less than their assigned

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acreage, which had the effect of reducing overall acres given to tobacco cultivation.\textsuperscript{5} On the surface, this may seem like a loosening of the regulations that governed the tobacco belt—a concession to the powers of the market responsible for tobacco oversupply. Marketing licenses issued by the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service testified to this new property right—one in pounds in addition to one in acres. The results were striking. Fewer acres of flue-cured tobacco were cultivated in 1965 than in 1935, which helped to flush out the surplus situation, and thereby increased the price per pound of tobacco. A decade after the Surgeon General’s Report was first released, flue-cured tobacco farmers produced their most valuable harvest to-date. A harvest valued at over $1.3 billion vindicated the predictions of the rural papers. The success of the tobacco program in precisely the years of the cigarette’s greatest contestation had its direct origins in the tobacco corporatism of the preceding decades. In 1974, Tobacco Associates hosted “prominent tobacco officials from Malaysia, West Germany, Thailand, the UK, Spain, Libya, Jordan, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Italy and Egypt.” Tobacco Associates staff who visited export markets themselves helped to secure the purchase of 70\% of flue-cured exports that year. The same year that Joe the Camel was born, flue-cured tobacco growers were celebrating their biggest year yet in terms of total leaf exported; the same year that the first state ordinances banning indoor smoking were passed, tobacco growers were proclaiming theirs “the most stable of all industries.”\textsuperscript{6}

The move toward poundage controls, paired with the increasing industrialization of the North Carolina piedmont—the “Old Belt,” the stronghold of the Tri-State

Cooperative, the home of the small holder—condensed tobacco production even further into the eastern Coastal Plain. The North Carolina “Triangle”—a model of university-driven Sunbelt development—was built out of a legal dialectic with the tobacco belt. Men and women who held allotments in the “Old Belt” joined with growers in the Coastal Plain to petition the USDA and congress for a limited leasing provision to the tobacco program. While quota could not be traded over county-lines—so a allotment holder in Durham could not rent his allotment to a grower in Greenville—it did facilitate two dynamics that ultimately strengthened tobacco corporatism: the political divestment of non-farming allotment holders from the tobacco program, and the consolidation of quota into larger farm-units. Those who remained in tobacco were extremely invested in the program, and, crucially, those who remained had much of the state extremely invested in them. For instance, the development of a mechanical harvester at N.C. State was possible only because farms large enough to justify mechanization could be stitched together through leases.\(^7\) As a result of these technological and legal changes, more than half of those engaged in tobacco production in North Carolina in 1964 had left the fields by 1978.\(^8\) And yet, it would be a mistake to overstate the impact of the harvester. In 1979 only twenty percent of the flue-cured crop was harvested by machine. For many farmers, the harvester was too expensive, acreage too small, and labor just cheap enough to justify what Pete Daniel has called “the persistence of the old tobacco culture.”\(^9\) Far from threatening the corporatist solidity of the tobacco belt, the consolidation of farm units through new forms of rental agreements may have actually strengthened the position of

\(^7\) Finger, *The Tobacco Industry in Transition*, 41.

\(^8\) Idem.

farmers. Those who remained as full time farmers had the best that tobacco cultivation had to offer: larger operations in practice, but small tobacco holdings on paper, as their actual proprietary (as opposed to leased) allotment did not change.

The late but decisive shift from a labor-intensive to a capital-intensive form of production means that that the political economy of tobacco could hold lessons for students of other commodities or for the agriculture sector more generally. Tobacco, of course, raises unique regulatory issues because of its impact on human health—but, increasingly, so do salt, soybeans, and sugar for their contribution to the obesity epidemic. Key features of the corporatist political economy of tobacco—the crop’s associative governance structure, the defensive mentality of its growers, the support of the land grant colleges, the ability of growers to envision and expand markets—bear striking similarities to other productive regimes. After all, producer-run, state-supported promotion and marketing groups like the Pork Council, the American Soybean Association, and the Sugar Association also define the habits and habitus of Americans. The twentieth century history of tobacco production cautions us against interpreting the importance of these groups as simply “regulatory capture.” Corporatism, the form of governance betwixt and between state and society, has historically ordered the agricultural sector. In our own era—by some accounts consumerist, service-oriented, post-racial, skeptical of the government, neoliberal—agriculture accounts for just over one percent of annual GDP. But the history of tobacco production suggests the following: agricultural governance—legally empowered white men supported by an agricultural bureaucracy structurally invested in their commercial and political success—

conditions Americans’ lives far beyond the field or fork, beyond the curing barn or curl of smoke. The history of tobacco production raises fundamental questions about the role of culture and history in American political economy: what are we seeing when we look at the land?

To answer this question, this dissertation has explored the policy continuities and revolutions within New Deal political economy, the role of the land grant college, the mechanics of market expansion, and the cultural importance of region. State-empowered—frequently, state-initiated—“private” interest groups were crucial in the development of an ambitious program of tobacco production. This program held visions of market expansion amidst supply restriction. The historical nature of the tobacco program, the freezing of acreage in 1933, was written onto the land—each old-fashioned curing barn disavowing farmers’ own agency in shaping the cigarette century. But the old curing barn and the auctioneer’s chant were merely illusions of anachronism. The chaos of the auction house and the artisanship of the golden cure hid the organizational achievements of tobacco country: tobacco farmers expanded markets and defended them all while effacing much of their own agency from the process as medical scrutiny of the cigarette intensified. I have argued that their achievements were due, in large part, to the corporatist nature of the tobacco economy. But tobacco corporatism was not only due to the successes of farmers, but also to the failure of our political vocabulary. Corporatism as a highly regimented form of economic and political governance that bestows monopolistic authority to producer groups has been considered alien to American political traditions. But at the juncture of state and society, inside the operations of groups
to which market-making and politically coercive functions have been delegated, we may find the construction and defense of the most American of figures.

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Tobacco is still produced in the United States. Indeed, it is the seventh most valuable commodity produced domestically, valued at $1.5 billion. But the essential features of its political economy have been transformed. Since 2004, the only places that you can hear the auctioneer’s chant live are at reenactments that elegize the passing of a “way of life” while educating urban and suburban North Carolinians, school children, mostly, about the history of tobacco in the state. Contracts, rather than auctioneers, now broker the transaction between buyer and seller. The individual contract rather than badges of sector-wide entitlement—the marketing card, the parity price, quota—heralds the end of the corporatist era of tobacco production and the start of a neoliberal one. Farmers are not singularly corralled as a group into parity with other economic sectors, and the government no longer assures a minimum price for leaf. The move toward contract was swift: in 1999, all American flue-cured tobacco was sold in the auction market. In 2003, 80 percent was grown under contract. And by 2005, all flue-cured tobacco was sold under contract. Contract farming was initiated by Philip Morris in

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12 The annual North Carolina State Fair frequently holds a mock tobacco auction conducted by retired auctioneers and buyers. The Duke Homestead Historic Site has a looped tape of a tobacco auction that plays when an anamatronic tobacco farmer explains historic aspects of tobacco production in a way that might be intelligible to a school child.
13 But that is not to suggest that tobacco farmers receive no help from the government. Agriculture policymakers now suggest that much subsidy for American farmers now comes in the form of low interest loans rather than through benefit payments. “Growing Wealthy on the Farm,” Washington Post, 19 February 2013.
1999 and represents, perhaps, a return to a form of social organization characteristic of the early twentieth century, before efforts toward cooperation began in earnest—a world in which individual farmers shoulder many more production risks than they did under the comprehensive federal tobacco program.

While economists still puzzle over the specific causes of the quick and complete shift in tobacco marketing, the contract followed and did not precipitate the demise of tobacco corporatism. The 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) and the 2004 Quota Buyout were two landmarks that acknowledged the socio-political investment in tobacco farmers even as they paved the way for the state’s divestment from the crop. The MSA was the largest civil settlement in history, bringing a close to the class action suits filed against the industry by the attorneys general of 46 states. In exchange for limitations on their future tort liability—the right of public institutions (not citizens) to sue the industry for money damages—the major tobacco manufacturers agreed to pay the states $206 billion, fund a $1.5 billion anti-smoking campaign, and open up previously secret industry documents on an online database. A little-discussed provision of the MSA concerned “Phase-II” Payments—$5 billion paid by the signatory manufacturers to growers. The MSA payments essentially acknowledged farmers as members of a single sector—not as individual stakeholders with a specific, proportionate share in tobacco production. North Carolina’s share of MSA funds were used to establish a non-profit corporation for economic development in tobacco dependent communities. The Golden LEAF foundation currently awards grants to local foundations that assist in non-tobacco

agriculture, job creation, and “workforce preparedness.”\textsuperscript{15} With such broad mandates, it is little wonder that some analysts have faulted the state-level decentralization of MSA funds for failing to keep “their promise to use settlement funds…to attack the enormous public health problems posed by tobacco use in the United States.”\textsuperscript{16} And yet, even this late chapter in the crop’s history underscores, once again, the persistence of region, and, indeed, local networks, in modern American political economy.

Nearly seventy years after \textit{United States v. Butler} invalidated the processing tax on the first Agricultural Adjustment Act as an unconstitutional transfer of wealth, the federal government compelled the major tobacco firms to buy farmers out of their tobacco program entitlements. \textit{Butler} was part of a series of decisions that ended the early New Deal’s experiments in the cartelization of industry as part of an end to America’s experiments industrial corporatism. But the quota buyout, passed as the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004, acknowledged in the breach the persistence of tobacco corporatism. Under the legislation, federal price supports and production controls were eliminated. Tobacco companies were ordered to pay quota owners a total of $9.6 billion in compensation for rents and to aid in the transition to a free market.\textsuperscript{17} The corporatist era of tobacco production ended much as it began: with a federally mandated wealth transfer from one coherent and unified sector to another.

A new political economy of production exists now in tobacco country—one of contracts, price fluctuations, computerized farm management, migrant labor streams, and


capital intensity. But some deeper features of an earlier era remain. Nickels for Know-How, the grower supported research initiative, is now in its sixtieth year. The endowment of the NC State’s Phillip Morris’ professorships have increased in recent years.\textsuperscript{18} And Stabilization, the grower-supported cooperative responsible for purchasing, storing, and re-selling the tobacco that failed to meet the government-mandated support price at auction, continues to “work hard to satisfy the tobacco needs of customers all over the world, from the United States to Europe to Asia.”\textsuperscript{19} Markets, science, and even civic life continue be made through organizational hybrids. With a political discourse leaves little room for the discussion of institutionalized, government-made monopolies as a quotidian, “normal” way of political life, it is easy to understand how the achievements of farmers have been overlooked. It is ironic, however, that in the most highly scrutinized of industries—an industry in which study itself has become a form of regulation—we may yet learn new ways of understanding American political economy.


Appendix

Figure 0.1
Geography of Flue-Cured Tobacco Production

Figure 0.2

U.S. Tobacco Farm Number and Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Farms (Thousands)</th>
<th>Average Tobacco Acres Per Farm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1

Inflation-Adjusted Price Per Pound (Price in 1935 dollars)

Figure 3.2

Flue-Cured Acres Harvested, 1935-1941

Figure 4.1

Estimated Consumption of Leaf Tobacco in European Factories (Tobacco Weight in Millions of Pounds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1932</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flue-Cured</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 4.2

Exports of Flue-Cured Tobacco to the United Kingdom and West Germany

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thousands of Pounds, 1935-1939 (avg.)</th>
<th>Percent of Total Exports</th>
<th>Thousands of Pounds, 1948-1950</th>
<th>Percent of Total Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>203,063</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>153,625</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Germany</td>
<td>4,012</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>53,587</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3

Exports of Flue-Cured Tobacco to Germany
(In thousand pounds, export weight)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4060</td>
<td>36,798</td>
<td>47,825</td>
<td>57,421</td>
<td>52,353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 4.4

World cigarette consumption, 1960-90

Figure 5.1

Flue-Cured Acres Harvested, North Carolina, 1945-1980

Figure 5.2

Flue-Cured Yield Per Acre, 1945-1980

Figure 5.3

Promotional Brochure

An informational brochure produced by the Tobacco Growers Information Committee and Tobacco Associates.

Source: Photo by Author. TGIC Records. Duke Homestead.
Figure 5.4

Phytotron at North Carolina State University

Figure 8.1

Trends in the Quantity of Tobacco Used in Cigarettes

Weight of Tobacco Used in Cigarettes

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