

(1998) and *The Politics of Long Division: The Birth of the Second Party System in Ohio, 1818-1828* (2000), he is

currently writing on Anglo-American political and economic relations before the Civil War.



Native Soil

A History of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau

By Eric Mogren

(DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005. Pp. xi, 288. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.)

In *Native Soil*, Eric Mogren describes how farsighted Illinois community leaders and farmers organized to improve agricultural techniques in an effort to raise rural standards of living and increase the prosperity of small-town businesses. Formed in 1912, the DeKalb Soil Improvement Association (SIA) hired a full-time farm advisor to assist local farmers in enhancing and preserving the quality of their soil. While many communities created such organizations to sponsor demonstration agents, Mogren contends that the SIA—renamed the DeKalb County Farm Bureau in 1916—was unique. Predating the 1914 Smith-Lever Act, which provided matching federal funds to hire state and county agricultural agents, the association established a tradition of local control missing from many of the groups that organized after the passage of that legislation. Ultimately, the men responsible for DeKalb's Farm Bureau did a remarkable job of serving their constituents, making a series of intelligent business decisions that gave the group a firm financial foundation.

As Mogren shows, Farm Bureau leaders confronted and met a wide range of challenges during the organization's first seventy years. After raising an initial \$10,000, the group struggled financially. They reluctantly applied for federal funds in 1914 but retained autonomy.

The association's first advisor, William Eckhardt, gained county acceptance thanks to his extensive knowledge and strong interpersonal skills. Eckhardt tested soil samples and prescribed seeding clover and applying lime to combat yield-limiting acidic soils. He arranged for annual cooperative bulk purchases of both substances, answered myriad inquiries from farmers, wrote columns for local newspapers, and published a newsletter. His successors continued and expanded his work, forming livestock and dairy marketing programs, youth clubs, and home management programs, as well as lobbying for property tax relief. The business arm of the DeKalb Farm Bureau, the DeKalb Agricultural Association, established an oil cooperative, a hybrid seed company, and local meat lockers.

After World War II, membership surged. Howard Mullins, DeKalb's new leader, hoped to represent grass-roots opinion on national farm policy—a stance that often put the organization at odds with the American Farm Bureau Federation. Mullins's activism, however, drew the attention of President John F. Kennedy, who appointed him to a position on the National Agricultural Advisory Commission. Locally, the DeKalb Farm Bureau remained active, supporting the creation of a junior college in the county and, in the 1970s, sponsoring two ambitious, but ultimately unsuccessful, trade groups: DeKalb County Exports (DCX) and DeKalb County Marketing Services (DCMS). Both organizations were created in an attempt to remove middlemen and increase profits by marketing high-quality DeKalb-branded products; DCX for grain and DCMS for meat. They foundered for numerous reasons, not least of which was the fact that the managers, although excellent farmers, lacked the marketing acumen to make the ventures successful.

Native Soil is an interesting account of the ways in which farmers and their (sometime) allies on Main

Street cooperated to bring greater prosperity to rural people. Mogren thoroughly describes the daily activities of the farm advisors, changes in staff and organization, and the group's numerous business ventures. The book's only disappointing aspect is that, aside from a reference to the opening of the county's new Center for Agriculture building in 1996, it ends with the collapse of DCX in 1982 and DCMS in 1987. Readers can only wonder how the organization coped at the millennium.

This is a minor complaint, however. Historians of the Midwest, Progressive reform, business culture, agriculture, and rural life will value the book. It should also prompt historians of the Hoosier experience to seek the similarities or differences that separate DeKalb County's story from that of Indiana's own rural institutions.

J. L. ANDERSON is assistant professor of history at the University of West Georgia, Carrollton. His manuscript, "Industrializing the Corn Belt: Iowa Farmers, Technology, and the Midwestern Landscape, 1945-1972," is under contract with Northern Illinois University Press.

