who rejected the new industrialized agriculture, and who joined various organizations to support a sustainable type of farming. Finally, in his focus upon farmers on the ground, Anderson has to assume a good bit of background knowledge about the politics of farming and the crucial role of governmental polices (rarely noting, for example, the role of government subsidies). Despite these caveats, this is a well-researched and informative book.

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A Revolution Down on the Farm
The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929
By Paul K. Conkin

The history of twentieth-century American agriculture is the story of rapid technological and scientific change, bountiful production, and farm population decline. It also is the story of changing agricultural policy, labor problems, and racism. It is a complicated story of the interaction of rural men, women, and children whose lives often were influenced by national and international developments beyond their control and knowledge. In this study, Paul Conkin emphasizes the transformation of agriculture since the onset of the Great Depression by stressing technological change and federal agricultural policy. He also reflects about his childhood on a farm in east Tennessee and ventures into the twenty-first century regarding policy matters related to the environment and public health.

Conkin provides a good survey of technological change. He correctly contends that the gasoline-powered tractor became the most important hardware technology on a national scale, but does not give enough emphasis to the significance of the mechanical cotton picker as the major regional technology, given its unintended consequences. Conkin provides an excellent analysis of agricultural policy beginning with the presidential administration of Herbert Hoover. His survey of New Deal agricultural policy is succinct, clear, and informative. Occasionally, additional information would clarify discussions of policy matters, for example, the importance of non-recourse loans for maintaining farm income and reducing risk in production. Conkin's discussion of the chemical revolution is thorough, his analysis of its effects on public health timely, and his survey of sustainable agriculture and organic farming useful.
The author’s most significant contribution, however, is his personal reflection about farm life in east Tennessee and Pennsylvania. Here, Conkin cogently describes agricultural life with particular attention to changes wrought by the world beyond farmyard and fields. Conkin writes about lost American country life—the necessity for farm women to establish reputations with local merchants as makers of high-quality butter, the way to determine whether hens remain productive layers or merit the chopping block, the memory of early spring as farm families’ “hungry” time when cellars ran low of preserved fruits and vegetables, and the hardscrabble need to pick wild fruits and nuts to help meet family food needs. He discusses the life-altering importance of electrification, which made hot water and indoor toilets a farm reality and which brought a new and enduring term into rural households—the light bill. He contrasts the farming in east Tennessee with that practiced by his sister and brother-in-law in Pennsylvania and shows that farm problems are common across regions and that differences often are merely matters of scale.

Conkin does not survey American agricultural history in a national context other than to discuss technology and policy, which necessarily limited his research base, and historians will find the notes rather thin. Still, he tells a great deal by using numbers, without losing the reader in minutia or deadly prose. Conkin is not particularly sympathetic to farmers who lost their land during the 1980s farm crisis, but he sees the agricultural policy of the twenty-first century clearly linked to the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, contrary to the opinion of some younger social scientists writing about contemporary farm policy. Overall, this study merits the attention of anyone interested in American agricultural history as well as those who should deal with contemporary scientific, environmental, and agricultural issues in U.S. history courses from the secondary to the university levels.

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