
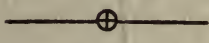


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The Cradle of the Farm Bureau Idea and Marketing Possibilities of the Bureau



An Address By

GEORGE A. CULLEN

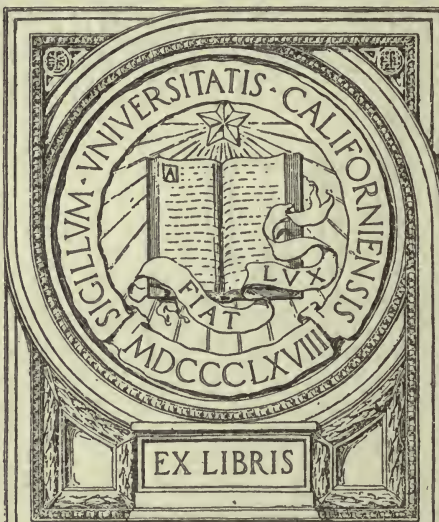
Vice-President of the North American Fruit Exchange

At the

**ANNUAL OUTDOOR MEETING OF THE
BROOME COUNTY (N. Y.) FARM BUREAU
BINGHAMTON, N. Y., AUGUST 21st., 1920.**

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ADDRESS BY GEORGE A. CULLEN

Members of the Broome County Farm Bureau, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In turning the pages of history, one of the facts that impresses us with force is the long reach of time that has seemed necessary before men gain a clear perspective as to the value of the services rendered by intrepid pioneers in the fields of constructive thought. This applies with special force to the earlier stages of our civilization. It required the passage of many centuries for the world to sense the power and spiritual beauty of the Star of Bethlehem, and to invest the little Judean village with hallowed associations. And so, also, the birthplace of Copernicus, who rescued astronomy from a maze of speculation and gave it the dignity of an exact science; and Runnymede, where the foundations of English civil liberty were laid; the workshop of Stephenson, where the application of steam to locomotion made possible our splendid systems of transportation; Independence Hall at Philadelphia, revered by patriotic Americans as the cradle of liberty.

I might multiply other equally striking instances where the homage of mankind has lagged behind the just deserts of genius, and only after the lapse of years has the world paid its debt to its benefactors by according a rich measure of honor and gratitude to their memories.

In the light of history, therefore, it is doubly significant of the progressive age in which we live, as well as of the remarkably sound and rapid development of the most thorough, practical, helpful and far-reaching movement in the agrarian life of the nation, that already, in less than ten years from the inception of that movement the eyes of the American people, from Coast to Coast, are turned with increasing respect and admiration to Broome County as the Cradle of the Farm Bureau Idea.

When the historian of the future shall write down for posterity the story of this vital development in the farm life of America, he will first pay grateful homage to that far-seeing, practical man, in whose mind was conceived the fundamental principle of the whole Farm Bureau Idea—Prof. W. J. Spillman—then Chief of the Bureau of Farm Management of the United States Department of Agriculture.

It was Dr. Spillman who, after a number of years of patient and searching intensive experiments with demonstration farms all over this country—with local demonstration agents in the South—and with the various other constructive measures employed by the Government to assist the farmer in systematizing his work along scientific lines, reached the definite conclusion that the one effective way to achieve worth-while results was to form county groups of farmers to co-operate

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with county agents in close, compact and responsive organizations. By intelligent and progressive methods of study and experiment it was proposed to increase the fertility of the soil by profiting by the discoveries of science, eliminating wasteful methods, and to jointly market their products.

It was my good fortune in the Fall of 1910—while Traffic Manager of the Lackawanna Railroad—and keenly interested, both personally and officially, in furthering agricultural development—to meet Dr. Spillman, with the happy result referred to in a letter I received from him a few days ago.

In this letter he says:

Washington, D. C.,
August 13th, 1920.

Mr. Geo. A. Cullen,
North American Fruit Exchange,
90 West Street, New York.

Dear Mr. Cullen:—

Referring to our recent conversation about the Farm Bureau movement, I think the magnitude this movement has assumed justifies setting down some of the facts concerning the first and farm bureau organized in this country.

The inception of the movement was the letter you wrote me proposing that the Office of Farm Management, of which I was then chief, co-operate with the Lackawanna Railroad in undertaking some special work for the benefit of agriculture at three points along that road in the state of New York. At your suggestion I visited Binghamton with a view to discussing ways and means of starting this work. As a result of this visit it was finally arranged that the Lackawanna road, the Binghamton Chamber of Commerce, the Agricultural Department at Cornell, and the Office of Farm Management co-operate in developing an organization for the purpose of supporting an agricultural expert with headquarters at Binghamton who would devote his entire time to a study of the local agriculture with a view of rendering such assistance as might be possible to the farmers of Broome County. If the work produced results of sufficient value similar work was to be started at other points along the road.

Previous to that time only one county agent had been appointed in this country, though there were a number of local demonstration agents in the cotton growing states. In no case had there been a local organization that had assumed any responsibility for the

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support and direction of work of this character. The term Farm Bureau was first applied to the organization at Binghamton. If I remember correctly, the office of Farm Management paid one-third of the salary of the first man employed by the Farm Bureau of Broome County, the remainder of the expenses being borne by the Lackawanna Railroad and the Binghamton Chamber of Commerce. The college at Cornell aided materially by way of advice and counsel on the parts of the various experts at the college.

The work in Broome County was so successful that the two other stations were soon established along the Lackawanna, and shortly thereafter applications began to come to the Office of Farm Management for the establishment of other bureaus in many different states. From that time forward the movement developed so rapidly that it was difficult to get funds to meet the demands. The present great organization known as the American Farm Bureau Federation is the direct outgrowth of the movement which thus had its inception in Broome County, N. Y.

Please remember me kindly to the good people of Broome County, whose hearty co-operation made the work there so successful.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) W. J. SPILLMAN.

This was the nucleus of a movement fraught with splendid possibilities and rich in accomplished facts. It has been a tremendous factor in applying scientific methods to the cultivation of the soil, bearing substantial rewards in larger yields and higher market returns. And if the past is a dependable prophet of the future, this movement is but in its infancy as to its potentialities for good.

In conversation two weeks ago with Mr. J. R. Howard, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation, he told me that the membership of the Federation is over a million and a quarter, and that he confidently expects to see it pass the two million mark before the end of the year.

You pioneers of Broome County may indeed feel proud of the splendid distinction which is yours of striking out into the wilderness of disorganization which existed ten years ago, and establishing an institution which promises more for the betterment of farm life, especially in its economic features, than any other force ever enlisted in this productive department of human endeavor. It is a monument to your vision and your initiative—one that commemorates a movement that has and will contribute to the lasting welfare and happiness of the American people.

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So much for the honored past. As forward looking men and women we are not nearly so much interested in what we have done as what we shall do.

I have in my hand a clipping from the front page of the "New York Tribune" of August 19th (two days ago). Here is what the Tribune reports:

PROFESSOR AND EIGHT SANDWICH MEN LOWER PRICES ON THE HEIGHTS

"There was a time when the neighbors of Dr. Robert Grimshaw on Washington Heights looked askance upon his schemes for making that community Manhattan's hilltop Utopia, but since yesterday noon they have been behind him—to a woman. It was three weeks ago that Dr. Grimshaw, a mechanical engineer of note and a member of the faculty of the College of the City of New York, pronounced his ultimatum.

Prices were much higher at the stores near his home than the altitude of Washington Heights warranted. He served notice on dealers, particularly on dealers in fruits and vegetables, that prices must come down. If they failed to come down, said Dr. Grimshaw, he would bring them down.

Grocers Snicker at Warning

Washington Heights laughed up its sleeve and the snicker was echoed more or less politely by every grocer along Broadway and St. Nicholas Avenue from 177th Street to 181st Street.

Dr. Robert Grimshaw said nothing whatever. When three weeks had expired yesterday and he noted the same wide margin between wholesale prices and those which his grocer-neighbors pasted above their tomatoes, potatoes, green corn, cucumbers, lettuce and so forth, Dr. Grimshaw crooked his little finger and eight

sandwich men sprang to do his bidding.

Panoplied in the accouterments of their trade, they were reviewed by Dr. Robert Grimshaw, who inscribed upon them, fore and aft, the wholesale prices of tomatoes, potatoes, green corn, cucumbers, lettuce and so forth. Thus armed, he sent them forth, to battle silently for his cause.

Prices Begin to Tumble

All the morning the valiant mercenaries trudged up one side of Broadway, down the other, across 177th Street, up St. Nicholas Avenue to 181st Street, down the other side of the avenue to 177th Street and back to Broadway. Housewives out for their morning marketing read that tomatoes that were labeled 20 cents in all the stores roundabout were to be had at wholesale for 4 cents or less.

They saw similar contrasts in the other prices quoted by the grocers and flaunted by the plodding sandwich men and they told the grocers what they thought about it. By noon the grocers' prices were wavering and falling on all sides. By early afternoon many of them had been divided by four or five. Dr. Grimshaw called off his sandwich men. He was modestly elated.

"Others in other districts," he said, "can and should do just what I have done in Washington Heights."

I do not know how accurate this report is nor am I one to believe everything that is said against the so-called middleman. The distributor, in some form, is just as necessary to our national life as the circulatory system is to our bodies. I do know, however, and you know, that there is to-day, as there has always been, too large a spread between what the producer receives and what the consumer pays for farm products, especially perishables—fruits and vegetables.

No one except a Lenine or a Trotsky would pretend to be able to reform immediately our whole marketing system, but reform must come and come without unreasonable delay if the grower is to get his due and the consumer cease to be obliged to pay prices that in turn call for a wage scale that creates the vicious circle of high living cost that is causing so much unrest among our people to-day.

I am unalterably opposed to any further development of class-consciousness in this country and I am only advocating team work when I say that the consumer must deal with his end of the problem—buying his food more cheaply—while the Farmer copes with his end, which of course is getting better prices for his products. Between the two I imagine a good many parasites are going to get pinched, but, I suspect they will be happier in the end and after they have learned to lead useful lives.

Now, what is the Farmer to do? Here is where the great usefulness of the Farm Bureau is manifesting itself and is going to do so in greatly increasing force in the future. The Farm Bureaus of the country are, I believe, to-day giving more attention to their marketing facilities than to any other of their problems. And naturally so.

They realize that while fertilizer makes more bushels per acre co-operative marketing makes **more dollars per man**.

Co-operative marketing is coming to be recognized as the one means by which the farmer can get away from the condition under which the buyer fixes the price of the product—a condition economically unsound—and reach a point where he can ask and get a price which will yield him a just reward for his toil. Co-operative marketing means, if not the elimination, the control of the speculator and the stabilizing of the whole industry.

Yes, asks the skeptic—made a skeptic perhaps by co-operative marketing experiments of a visionary or utopian character, many of which have been tried but to fail—what essentials are involved in a successful co-operative marketing plan?

I will try to outline them to you in a few words:

First: The impossible must not be attempted nor must effort be made to reach the ideal at one bound

Second: It must be recognized that we live in an age of specialization and success in any business lies in the employment of specialists to do work requiring special training and familiarity with marketing conditions.

Third: There are several distinct and separate general divisions of marketing, such as grain (including hay) live-stock, dairying produce, fruits and vegetables and possibly one or two others, each of which requires knowledge of trade

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conditions, the consumers' requirements, credits and transportation different from any of the others.

Fourth: Any system of distribution that is dependent on local markets is subject to violent variations ranging from extreme scarcity to ruinous gluts and therefore any sound system must ensure outlet at all times to the widest possible range of markets; a system that will at all times place the product **where** it is needed **when** it is needed—and that really is the crux of the whole marketing problem.

Fifth: As an absolutely essential part of placing the product **where** it is needed **when** it is needed is a system of ascertaining accurately from day to day the consumers' needs in all available markets and disseminating that knowledge to all growers co-operating in a given marketing organization. I may say right here that there is only one sure way this information can be made reliable. It does the grower little good to know what the demand was in Cleveland or Pittsburg or Philadelphia or New York last week or even what it was yesterday. He must know what it is **now** and the only way he can know that is on the basis of a confirmed order for his product.

Sixth: The Grower must have a nation-wide system of distribution that not only secures for him the confirmed orders just referred to, but a system that provides him with representatives in the various markets who serve his interests and his alone, and are not interested in the buying but only in the selling of his product so as to do away with the pernicious practices of rejections and deductions that now always accompany a declining market and sometimes even a rising one.

Seventh: The Grower must recognize the primary business aspects of the national marketing problem and examine very carefully into the ability of any marketing agency or system to give him continuous and dependable service. He must, and he naturally will, view with great caution any organization officered and conducted by those dependent for their positions on what may be called political considerations, by which is meant, of course, the wire-pulling, intrigue, personal jealousies and ambitions, which are so much in evidence when one set of officers can be turned out of office on short notice, and the swapping of horses while crossing streams go on year after year, with the resultant impairment of morale and efficiency in operations with the business world.

In conclusion I may say that in organization within County Farm Bureaus and in co-operation between groups of Bureaus lies to-day the farmer's surest reliance for dealing through disinterested selling organizations and securing the protection and prosperity which is so justly his due.

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