Manufacturing the American way of farming: Agriculture, agribusiness, and marketing in the postwar period

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Manufacturing the American way of farming: Agriculture, agribusiness, and marketing in the postwar period

by

Margaret B. Weber

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rural, Agricultural, Technological, and Environmental History

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

2018

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DEDICATION

To my mother, father, and sisters
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one writes alone. I know it may sometimes feel like it; sitting at a computer, banging away at a keyboard, only peeking out at the wider world to grab coffee or glare at boisterous undergrads. But developing this project has shown me that researching and writing is as much about working with others as it is about learning to live with yourself. I have had the joy (and sometimes sorrow) of discovering how to do both since I embarked upon this dissertation and I am endlessly grateful for the people who steered me in the right direction.

I have been lucky to have the guidance of different mentors, all of whom helped shape my development as a scholar and a person. From the beginning, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg provided continuous support as I attempted to navigate graduate school. Her honesty, productivity, and willingness to help inspired my own efforts. Kathleen Hilliard and Julie Courtwright also offered a constant source of reassurance. Whether it was discussing writing patterns or being the only one to laugh at my jokes, Julie fostered a creative spirit in me. She showed me that the way you write history is just as important as how you research it and gave me the courage to find my own voice on the page. Kathleen Hilliard’s mentorship offered me a roadmap to an altogether confusing set of academic and professional challenges. Her willingness to meet, answer questions, offer honest opinions, and listen to graduate student grumbling (and sometimes panic) has always amazed and humbled me. This steady patience is at the core of my development, allowing me to find myself in a sea of people who seemed to know exactly what to do and how to act. Each one of these women inspires me to be a better scholar, teacher, and person. Thank you for being my mentors.

Additionally, other historians have also contributed to my growth, including Amy Rutenberg, Michael Christopher Low, Jana Byars, John Monroe, Michael Bailey, David Hollander, Simon Cordery, Stacy Cordery, Claire Strom, and many others. Even when I failed, which I did often, all of their encouragement gave me the confidence to continue to try. This dissertation, along with every other piece of scholarship, would not exist without any of these professors or Iowa State’s history department in general. I am lucky to have been a part of such a supportive and dynamic community of learners who recognized and welcomed me as one of their own. Thank you for helping me grow up.

Graduate school, despite being terrifying and maddening at times, is the place that I have found acceptance and friendship. Foremost, I have been fortunate to have relationship with the incomparable Jennifer Rivera. The backbone of the history department, she has been part sage, part counselor, and always a friend. Her presence, along with the guidance of Sara Egge and Rachel Kleinschmidt, allowed me to adapt quickly to graduate school life. Additionally, I was always amazed by the amount of genuine affection and support from my cohort. Matthew Margis, Kelly Wenig, Maria and Mark Howe, Lindsay Bell, Brandon Duxbury, Hope and Mike Craft, and numerous others listened to my problems and kept me from taking myself too seriously. The countless conversations with Jack Seitz and Savanna Lyons, both the serious and the silly, showed me the depth of companionship. They have inspired me to be a better person. My gaming group, led by Fred and Maricel Lloyd, kept me sane and offered a home away from home. Finally, Michael Belding and Katherine Warming have been my constant confidants and supporters when writing my dissertation; reading drafts, giving solid advice, and often helping
translate what was in my head onto paper. Mickey’s consummate understanding of academic writing and his editorial flourish challenged me to write with precision and purpose. Katherine often knew me better than I knew myself; listening, discussing thematic elements, and talking me down from the writing edge. Without these people and many others, I would have never been able to compete my work. Thank you all for being my friends.

Lastly, my family has always been my biggest provider of support and unconditional love. Mom, Dad, Ally, and Jackie are main reason why I am the person I am today. Mom and Dad, you are my safe haven, my stalwarts, and my dual voices of reason and encouragement. You gave me the courage to follow my dreams and pragmatism to make it actually happen. From the beginning, you both instilled in me a lifelong passion for learning and the confidence to be curious about the world around me. You fed my addiction to books, offered encouragement when I was down, and cheered me on when I succeeded. I am lucky to call you my parents. Along with my parents, my two sisters Ally and Jackie formed the core of who I am. Our lives have been inseparable and I would not have it any other way. As my first and best friends, you both have been there for every important moment. Your unquestioning affirmation (even when I made questionable fashion decisions or exhibited painfully uncool behaviors) gave me the self-assurance to be myself. Your unflinching honesty never let me get too self-centered. When I think of you both, my mind forever wanders back to the beaches of Kinsale, watching the boats and reading a book on waterside. I am lucky to call you my sisters. Thank you, Mom, Dad, Ally, and Jackie, for loving me.
ABSTRACT

The rise of the corporation is one of the most transformative events in the history of United States, including the agricultural economy. Seeking to understand how these private businesses influence American foodways, my research examines the emergence of agribusiness in the period after 1945. These private entities manipulated the physical and metaphysical landscape of agriculture to sell not just their products, but also to remake rural America in a way that suited their needs. Agribusinesses wanted to make themselves, their products, and their specific vision of production and consumption, indispensable to the agricultural system. They intended to expand their hold on the food and fiber economy and their actions directly reflected this end-goal. They attempted to do this by fundamentally altering the way people, both the public at large and farmers, viewed and understood agriculture. By manipulating conceptions of agriculture, agribusinesses created a new ethos that centralized their place in the political economy of agriculture, celebrated technological determinism and high modernism, modified agricultural values to fit their own perceived ideal, and simplified many rural identities to fit a single idea. This fusion created an inherently contradictory image of agriculture, where the material reality, a capital-intensive and technical system controlled by corporate forces, differed greatly from America’s idyllic perception of farming and farmers. These fluctuating conceptions allowed agribusiness to construct an agricultural system that wholly dependent on large companies for preservation and operational success.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Let us imagine, somewhere in south-central Iowa, in the early spring of 1942, a litter of pigs was born. The farm itself was average sized, around 165 acres, and diversified. It primarily grew hybrid corn, but also alfalfa, legumes, and a large vegetable garden. Dairy cows, a flock of chickens, and hogs rounded out the outfit. Cloistered in a cozy wooden barn, the litter of nine piglets matured for a few weeks, waiting out the last moments of winter. Finally, with the retreating winds releasing their icy grip on the landscape, the pig family moved out to pasture. Over the next six months, the piglets grew fat on legumes, roots, nuts, alfalfa, milk skimmed from the farm’s small dairy, and even scraps from the dinner table. Throughout the long spring and summer, the fattening hogs watched the farm family ready their fields. Maybe using a new tractor or still hitching up their horses to a steel plow, the family would cultivate their fields. The whole family would be involved, with the sowing and reaping requiring many hands to maintain the crops’ integrity, fertility, and pest control. No doubt the piglets would see the family engaged in all sorts of different hand labor. Daily tasks including feeding the farm animals in the morning, maintaining the fields, milking the dairy herd, and gathering eggs. The busiest time though happened in mid-summer. After the fall harvest, the pigs might join the farm’s small herd of cows to graze the corn fields, allowing the homestead to recoup some of their crop losses and fertilize its fields at the same time.

Eventually though, by the end of fall, the once small litter would have grown into their adult size. With flat broad arched backs and tail heads counter-sunk, these swine fit the desired particulars for the lard-type of hog, stubby and round with layers of fat encircling muscle. Now ready for market, the farm family would drive the hogs out of the pasture, passing the harvested fields of hybrid corn, soy beans, alfalfa, hay and other grains, moving beyond the small dairy
barn, the flock of chickens and the large garden, before loading them into a truck, perhaps owned and operated by a friendly neighbor. After deciding to keep one or two hogs for their own uses, the farmer would transport the rest to the local stock market or sale ring. It was there that representatives from packing plants and meat lockers would bid on the hogs.

Maybe then, finding these particular hogs to his liking, a representative from Rath Packing Company would buy the hogs and send them to the company plant in Waterloo, Iowa. Built a year earlier in 1941, the plant was largest single unit meat packing facility in the country, where 4,500 union employees slaughtered more than two million animals a year. After arriving via truck from the south, the hogs would be slowly moved through a “disassembly line.” After being killed, scalded in hot water, bristles removed (and kept for brushes), and skinned, factory workers (members of the United Packinghouse Workers of America) would split the hogs vertically from snout to tail, removing the head, organ meat, and lard for use in shortening, fertilizer, animal feeds, casings, and pharmaceuticals. Workers then relocated the carcasses to a chiller room before they traveled to the cutting department on a conveyor belt. It was here that the most skilled workers would further dismember the carcasses at a series of stations, before finally separating them into the three different sections (shoulders, middling, and hams). While much of the carcass would eventually make its way to the sausage, canning, and curing departments, the first and most important cut on the body happened to be Rath’s signature product, the ham. Removing the rest of the skin and fat, a skilled worker, one who had worked his way up the packing ladder, would then trim down the piece to meet the company’s exacting standards. Depending on the type of product, the ham could then move to the smoke house, curing department, a salt bath, or canning processors. Some hams though, were transferred to the fresh pork division, where they would be chilled again and wrapped for travel.
Finally, these products would be packed in refrigerated train units and shipped across the Midwest. Once arriving at their destination in Milwaukee, the workers unloaded the hams and transported them by cold trucks to area grocers and large-scale butcher shops. Once at a grocery store, the ham would rest for a short time, nestled between competitors such as Swift, Armour, Wilson, and Cudahy, all gleaming under the lights of the display cases. At last, a woman would choose that particular ham, pay the butcher, and transport it to its final use. Sometime later, maybe that very night, the woman would take it from the refrigerator or ice box and prepare it for a family meal. Though not as fancy as a chicken dinner or beef tenderloin, the ham would make a suitable meal for the household. Anticipating the long preparatory process, the housewife rolled up her sleeves and got down to work.

Let us imagine that the unknown woman was not the only customer investigating the ham in the grocery store that day. There was an older man as well, thin and unwell, leaning against the glass to get a better look at the chops. He was not there to buy, but instead to survey the competition. As a local butcher from the area, Edward Schuster was not all that impressed by the uniform cuts of the Waterloo-based company. Maybe he even sneered at the lack of craftsmanship, uniqueness, and the unknown quality of the ingredients. Schuster and Sons prided itself on the use local products, buying its pork and beef from area farmers, local hunters for venison, and housing its own chicken coop for the occasional chicken meal. For more than thirty years, the Menomonee Falls butcher provided the area favorites, including homemade sausage and prepared fowl. So, perhaps he left the store with a new found faith and confidence in the future of his shop. Given the superior quality of his product, my great grandfather may have believed that nothing would change.
This imagined story illustrates one of the most startling developments in the modern era, the food chain.\(^1\) With a clear linear focus, from animal to slaughter, processor to customer, the food and fiber industry of the early 1940s was one of national proportions and clearly defined tasks. The system created a factory-like timetable of commodity transportation. A web of bureaucrats, policy-makers, and industry technocrats worked together to sustain the food requirements for a country at war. Coming out of a two decade-long rut, the federal promise of price parity for agricultural goods jumpstarted the agricultural economy.\(^2\) Prosperity led farmers to invest in new mechanical technologies. The interwar period’s improvements to transportation allowed the red meat chain to handle the amplified volume of commodity movement. Increased demands for foodstuffs (especially meat) yielded high profits to processors and retailers alike. But even this agricultural chain, with its big processors and mechanization, still faced a society that had yet to fully adapt to a segmented and industrial system.

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\(^1\) Defining modernity presents many problems for any academic discussion. Beyond its various uses in other fields of study (including literature, art, and critical theory), definitions of modernity often change depending on time and place. Therefore I am using modernity in two different capacities, both as *my* understanding and how my academic *subjects* understood the term. *I* am defining modernity in terms of Chinese historian Mark Elvin’s definition of the modern; that modernity is the ability to create power and that power is the capacity to change the structure of systems. This contains three elementary components that are interdependent; “Power over other human beings, whether states, groups or individuals, according to the level of the system under consideration. (2) Practical power over nature in terms of the capacity for economic production. (3) Intellectual power over nature in the form of the capacity for prediction, and more generally - of an accurate and compactly expressed understanding.” Mark Elvin, "A Working Definition of ‘Modernity’?" *Past & Present*, no. 113 (1986): 209-13. In terms of how many of my *subjects* (that is, employees, agricultural experts, and other individuals attached to agribusiness) understood modernity, they comprehended modernity through the lens of postwar nationalistic claims of American exceptionalism and belief in an evolutionary march towards an industrial ideal in agriculture. For more information, see Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Dorothy Ross, "American Modernities, Past and Present." *The American Historical Review*, 116, no. 3 (2011): 702-14.

Despite the efforts of experts, policy-makers, scientists, technocrats, and industry-capitalists, systems of agriculture and food in the early part of the 1940s were still profoundly localized, communal, and, in many ways, non-industrial. Many people continued to provide some part of their family’s food. Canning, curing, and other food preservation remained yearly events that conserved the family’s supplies. There were very few supermarkets that offered a one-stop-shop for a family’s grocery needs. Convenience and quick meals had yet to fully become part of the marketplace. Meal preparation continued to be one of the most important and time-consuming tasks for women, one that reflected the limits of the technology available to most Americans. For farms and their families, community and self-sufficiency remained critical features of everyday life. Many of the technological innovations (including large scale mechanization, chemicals, and an emphasis on specialization) of the previous half century had yet to be fully adopted by families that had learned to “do without.”³ So while the outside of the food system appeared highly commercial and capitalistic, the fact remained that much of agricultural production and food consumption failed to live up to these expectations. But despite my grandfather’s proclamation, much would change in the coming decades with the emergence of one economic juggernaut, agribusiness.

The rise of the corporation is one of the most transformative events in the history of America’s economy, including the agricultural industry. Growing alongside a developing web of expertise and the modern state, agribusinesses caused not just deep structural changes to America’s physical reality, but also to the way people perceived the world around them. After the Second World War, the development of agribusinesses exploded with unprecedented ferocity. Aided by postwar circumstances, including technological and scientific advancements,
federal policy changes, and rural depopulation, many companies saw their operations grow enormously. Sales numbers spiked, even as more than ten million Americans left farming all together. And with the growing intimacy between private business and public institutions like the United States Department of Agriculture and the land-grant system, the food and fiber industry was ripe for corporate expansion.

Of course, agribusiness existed long before its concentrated growth in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Initially coined in 1957 by a former USDA bureaucrat, John Davis defined agribusiness as, “the sum of all operations involved in the manufacture and distribution of farm supplies; production operations on the farm; and the storage, processing, and distribution of farm commodities and items made from them.” He wanted the term to embody the intense changes the food system was undertaking, especially in terms of the control and direction. Davis saw a new relationship between business and agriculture, one that integrated corporatization into nearly every aspect of the food chain. In many way though, Davis was simply giving a name to a conception that had long existed. Agribusiness had been institutional force in agriculture for decades and its roots can be found in the modernization of American society itself.

As a term, agribusiness was and is fraught with a multitude of definitions that can befuddle even the keenest of observers. It can describe a system of agriculture that relies on commercialism and industrialization or the ideological philosophy that supports the structure. Agribusiness has been connected to the web of agricultural professionals and the emergence of industrial-food complex on a global scale. In higher education, agribusiness has become a

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4 John H. Davis and Ray A. Goldberg, A Concept of Agribusiness (Boston: Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, 1957), 2.
sought-after degree, with various sub-disciplines in marketing, technology, and communication. Politically, agribusiness represents an amalgamation of powerful industries, all looking to continue their influence on federal policy and regulation. As a conception then, agribusiness represents many different yet related entities. It is recognized as a system, a mentality, a degree in higher education, a powerful lobbying force, interweaving technocratic and capitalistic institutions, and a buzzword to sell books and engage the readers. Yet buried under all of these different descriptions is the core of what agribusiness actual is: private business engaged in the food chain. All of these explanations refer to, in some way or another, these agricultural companies, corporate entities that contribute to agricultural production and wider consumption. These companies are the backbone of the nation’s modern agricultural system.

There are many different viewpoints on the development of modern agriculture. Historians have often tried to determine who exactly steered its growth. Some have pointed to federal policymakers, scientific experts, and their influence over farm prices and production. Others have commented on the agency of farmers and how their choices shaped modern farming. Still others have traced the powerful dialogue between reformers and institutions and how this created a new philosophy to remake rural life.⁶ While these all works have added immeasurably to our understanding of change in agriculture, many failed to address the corporate force driving the transformation in the first place.

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⁶ Though this is no way covers all the important works that discuss the development of agriculture in the twentieth century, several books that overview this topic include Gilbert Fite, American Farmers: The New Minority (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981); David B. Danbom, Born in the Country: A History of Rural America (2nd ed. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006); Douglas R. Hurt Problems of Plenty. Scholars who explored topics of agrarianism and intellectual development include Deborah Fitzgerald, Every Farm a Factory; Gabriel Rosenberg, The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016); Alan Marcus, Agricultural Science and the Quest for Legitimacy: Farmers, Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, 1870-1890 (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1985). J.L. Anderson, Industrializing the Corn Belt: Agriculture, Technology, and Environment, 1945-1972 (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).
In fact, only a small number of scholars have even remotely discussed agribusiness, a
group equally if not more important than farmers in molding the narrative of America's food and
fiber industry. Of these works, most scholars have chosen to focus on the adaptation of the rural
community to this growing pressure in a specific region, or through the lens of a commodity.
Both Mary Neth’s Preserving the Family Farm and Joe Anderson’s Industrializing the Corn Belt
discussed ways rural people in the Midwest accepted, resisted, and adapted to outside influences.
Jenny Barker Devine’s On Behalf of the Family Farm specifically detailed how rural women
navigated the postwar food chain and used their own femininity to challenge male power. Others,
like Tore Olsson’s article “Peeling Back the Layers,” chronicled the corporate expansion of a
single commodity, Vidalia onions, into a global food business. Scholarship on California
agriculture, including Benny J. Andrés’ Power and Control in the Imperial Valley, also
demonstrate the influence of agribusiness. Finally, Shane Hamilton’s Trucking Country and
“Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post–
World War II United States,” both analyzed the connections between postwar politics, ideology,
and the rise of agribusiness in the rural context. His article on the nature of the postwar farm
policy debate and its influence on American conceptions of agriculture was especially important
to recognizing the intersection between politics, economics, and culture.7 For the most part,
scholars have dealt with the consequences of expanding agribusiness domination. However, very
few have examined how and why agribusiness was able to attain this control in the first place.

7 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm; J.L. Anderson, Industrializing the Corn Belt; Jenny Barker-Devine On Behalf
of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women’s Activism since 1945 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013); Tore
Olsson, “Peeling Back the Layers: Vidalia Onions and the Making of a Global Agribusiness,” Enterprise & Society,
13, no. 4 (2012), 832-861; Benny J. Andrés’ Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and
Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015); Shane
Hamilton, Trucking Country: The Road to American’s Wal-Mart Economy (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
2008); Hamilton, “Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post–World
None of these scholars have looked explicitly at private companies: their beliefs, desires, and the deliberate actions they took. For all of their influence, agribusinesses as private establishments remain remarkably hidden from view. They are referred and alluded to, but very rarely actually studied. In fact, other than scholar Wayne Broehl’s work on Cargill and John Deere, no scholar has analyzed specific companies and their contributions to our understanding of the modern food system. How can scholars comprehend these larger changes without examining one of its primary influencers? Frequently, it was these entities that were the driving force behind the transformation of the food chain. What did companies want and how did they seek to achieve it? What mentality drove their actions? What problems did they encounter and how did they attempt to solve them? What did these agribusinesses want their customers to believe and how did they engage with them? In order to truly comprehend these changes, historians must discuss the companies that helped enact them.

Moreover, while several scholars have examined the physical changes to the food and fiber industry, almost none have studied the changes to the perception of food production and consumption. After the Second World War, American conceptions of agriculture and the people connected to it became simplified. Very few historians have alluded to the reduction of farming identity into a conception as simple as mom and apple pie. Historians have yet to examine the process of how farmers shifted culturally from producers to consumers in post-war America. Finally and most importantly, historians have not addressed the disconnection between the American public’s view of farming and the reality of contemporary agriculture. Simply put, most Americans have little conception of the scope, development, and inherent contradictions within their food system. By ignoring the power and scope of agribusiness to inform and manipulate

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conceptions of agriculture, scholars have not fully deciphered the invisible giant lurking in America’s countryside. To better understand the influence of agribusiness, it is critical to study how companies attempted to transmit their message to the American masses.

With these gaps in mind, my research examines one of the most transformative changes of the twentieth century, the emergence of agribusiness in the period after 1945. These private entities manipulated the physical and metaphysical landscape of agrarianism to sell not just their products, but also to remake rural America in a way that suited their needs. Agribusinesses wanted to essentialize themselves, their products, and their specific vision of production and consumption, to the agricultural system. They intended to expand their hold on the food and fiber economy and their actions directly reflected this end-goal. They attempted to do this by fundamentally altering the way people, both the public at large and farmers, viewed and understood agriculture. By manipulating conceptions of agriculture, agribusinesses created a new ethos that centralized their place in the political economy of agriculture, celebrated technological determinism and high modernism, modified agricultural values to fit their own perceived ideal, and simplified many rural identities to fit a single idea. This fusion created an inherently contradictory image of agriculture, where the material reality (a capital-intensive and technical system controlled by corporate forces) differed greatly from America’s abstract perception (an idyllic vision of farming and farmers). These fluctuating conceptions allowed agribusiness to construct an agricultural system that wholly depended on large companies for functionality and sustainability.

Foremost, this dissertation will be an institutional history of agribusiness in the 1950s and 60s. It will be written from the perceptive of these companies and how they created and then attempted to market their ethos to customers, both farmers and food consumers. This dissertation
will not cover the response from customers themselves, whether not they wholeheartedly accepted these notions, rejected them, or fell somewhere in between. While this is an extremely important topic in its own right and adds an essential component to the overall narrative of modern agriculture, the work required to adequately cover this topic is simply too much at this time. This work is about the first part of the story. But the dissertation will still offer some glimpses into customer reaction. It will attempt to describe how customer reaction forced these agribusinesses to change their image, policy, and market strategy. This work will also examine how some consumers utilized these embedded systems of consumption for their own benefit.

These revisions of agriculture deeply altered rural identity and community bonds. One outcome of this push was the consolidation of many different types and forms of agricultural identity to a single, simplified version favored by business interests and their allies. The recreation of the farmer as a broad scale consumer, competitor, and businessman limited the very type of person who could possibly be conceived of as a farmer. Agribusinesses and their rhetoric ideologically separated non-white, non-male, small-scale, and a whole host of other Americans from agriculture. Agribusiness also profoundly changed the ways individual farmers and their communities viewed competition, cooperation, and communal systems. By excluding struggling farmers from local exchange networks and viewing them as inefficient rivals, agribusinesses believed that their customers would embrace a new modern system of agriculture. Depopulation trends only helped to multiply this perception, as farmers saw more and more of their kind leave agriculture. Instead of understanding community as a proximity, a physical space made up of flesh and blood individuals, agricultural companies wanted farmers to expand their construction to include non-corporeal entities like agribusiness. To achieve this, businesses sought to integrate themselves within these established bonds of rural spaces.
This work looks at a critical period of development in the relationship between agriculture, corporatization, and the political economy. It seeks to understand the influence of corporations on labor and performance in food production and consumption. The postwar period witnessed a shocking number of changes to the food chain. State policy encouraged a “get big or get out” mentality in agriculture. Scientific and technological advancements increased agricultural efficiency and production. The growth of supermarket chains reconstructed the environmental landscape of retail sales and consumerism. The postwar emphasis on middle class values levelled customer expectations and consumption patterns. And, of course, the explosion of agribusinesses produced a new level of corporatization never seen before in the food and fiber system. These changes, even when embraced, were no doubt unnerving for many Americans.

Aware that this new food chain was problematic and difficult to market, agribusinesses deliberately crafted a nostalgic vision of agriculture that was much more palatable to the public at large. This “American Way of Farming” sold agribusiness’ products (and the system that produced them) by shrouding itself in talismans and symbols of an older agricultural network. By hiding the reality of a capitalistic food and fiber system, agribusinesses attempted to control how the public perceived the industry. These companies are some of the most powerful in the modern food industry and their rhetoric deeply affected perceptions of both urban and rural spaces, hallmarks of identity, and community interactions. My discussion of the development of agribusiness seeks to answer a number of understudied questions about America’s relationship with institutionalized foodways, including how the public conceives of and justifies its food and fiber system.

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9 As with any term that has many different things at many different times, finding a precise definition to “political economy” can be quite fraught. In terms of this work, political economy refers to the intersection between power and resources. It discusses the connections between political development and economic processes and ultimately how this junction influences social and cultural institutions.
With this in mind, I have chosen five different companies that show the diversity and range of agribusiness in the postwar era. Each one of these companies represented an important link in the food chain, from input businesses to output food processors. They also were respected leaders in their fields, archetypes that exemplified their specific industry. International Harvester and Pioneer Hi-Bred, both primarily agricultural corporations with roots in early twentieth century, continued their business growth by providing valuable input products to farmers. Monsanto, a chemical giant, entered into the agricultural industry with the expansion of fertilizers after the Second World War. Rath Packing Company and Perdue Chicken epitomized the powerful meat packers, a sub-industry with feet in direct processing and retailing. Each represents an opportunity to examine the patterns of development from different points-of-view.

Of course, this work will also be discussing other corporations, including direct competitors, but these five companies make up the bulk of the researched material.\(^\text{10}\) Not only do they showcase the scope of agribusiness’ power, but also a range of experiences and operations. Some had long been a part of the agricultural industry, while others were entering for the first time. Many companies sought to expand their product line beyond agriculture. Conversely, several were content to remain within the boundaries of food and fiber. Certain companies struggled in the postwar period, facing increased competition or stagnant demand. For most though, the postwar era was an economic boom time, allowing them to expand their operations and explore new revenue streams. Despite their differences, agribusiness employees held remarkably similar beliefs and they acted in remarkably similar ways. Whether successful or not,

\(^{10}\) It is important to note that all of these companies, though some were more curated than others, held records open to researchers. This is relatively rare, as many corporations are hostile to outside researchers. Therefore, their openness was one of the major reasons they were chosen for this work. Outside of Perdue Chicken (now known as Perdue Farms), all of these corporations have either “died” or been sold off to other firms involved in Big Agriculture. It was the relocation of direct control or “death” that allowed company records to be transmitted to academic archives.
all companies sought to expand their hold on the larger industry. They served a wide range of customers and regions, eventually paving the way for agribusiness to become the global institution it is today. But perhaps most importantly, all of these corporations espoused similar principles to other agribusinesses, including the adoption of large-scale, cash-based, industrial agricultural production and top-down, national-scope, corporate-driven consumption. Each company was a strong participant in its respected field and thus represents a “typical” example of that sub-industry, making it ideal to use as a lens to examine the larger industry’s influence. From the selection of Rath, Perdue, Pioneer, Monsanto, and International Harvester, we can find and draw parallels in the organizational makeup, history, mentality, and practice of agribusinesses.

In order to fully understand corporate America’s vision of the food and fiber industry, it is important to examine the different beliefs and methods they used to manipulate their customers and the public at large. My chapters will explore different aspects of the food chain, from agricultural production to retail and processing elements. The first three chapters cover the various ways corporations manipulated aspects of time, postwar experiences, and identity. The first chapter will explore how agribusinesses conceived of the past and present. Believing in a technological-determinist vision of history, these companies sought to present themselves as critical components of progress, essentially replacing human agency with corporate ingenuity. The first part of this marketing strategy depended on reverence for the past. Beyond their own company origin stories, all of these companies romanticized the position of farmers in America history and their own place within that narrative. They argued that national and global issues of the postwar era required new behavior standards within agricultural operations. Maintaining that farmers needed to adopt new models of labor and gender (paradigms that directly benefited
agribusiness), agribusinesses blended mythology and reality to essentialize their place in agriculture.

The second and third chapters explore how agribusinesses manipulated rural identity to suit their needs. The second chapter will examine how agribusinesses attempted to invigorate mass consumerism in rural spaces. Emphasizing the need for farmers to become consumers, agribusinesses desired their customers to see their products (and by extension, the companies) as necessary tools to a functional and prosperous countryside. With this focus in mind, the third chapter discusses competition, community, and farming as a business rather than a lifestyle. This chapter observes the ways agribusinesses advocated for increased competition between farmers, trying to reshape perceptions of community and who, and who did not, deserve to be a continuing part of the agricultural industry. For rural communities, agribusinesses profoundly changed the ways individual farmers viewed competition, cooperation, and communal systems of exchange. By attempting to manipulate identity, agribusinesses sought to solidify their place within rural America while dismissing fears of depopulation and struggling farmers.

Chapters four and five explore the relationship between high modernism, the cult of convenience, and agribusinesses. Chapter four discusses how agribusiness used science and technology as a philosophical justification of their control and as a marketing tool. Scientific growth and increased technological adoption also reinforced corporate understandings of their role within the wider industry. Bolstered by greater sales numbers and product innovation, these corporations alleged that they and their technocrats held to key greater agricultural success. Agribusinesses resolutely believed in not just the possibility of biological control, but also that nature itself could and should be mastered by humans. These businesses assumed that they could create a perfectly imagined environment, one that could be organized and operated much like a
factory. With these beliefs in mind, agribusinesses further commodified agricultural knowledge, underpinning the necessity of their continued presence.

On the other end of the cold chain, the fifth chapter discusses the wider transformation of the food retail industry after the Second World War. Just as agribusinesses involved in commodity production looked to solidify their place through the promise of biological control, so too would corporations connected to food retail (including processors, packers, supermarket chains, appliance manufacturers, and others), utilize a similar conception to ensure their growing top-down regulation and corporate management of this industry. For food retailers though, this promotion centered on their assurance of convenience, a conception they transmitted to customers through advertisements, marketing ploys, and other public relations efforts. This cult of convenience promised accessibility, ease, and variety without losing quality assurance. By proving that large businesses could bring this convenience to customers, agribusinesses looked to remake the retail landscape and further insinuate corporatization into America’s grocery stores and pantries.

Finally, my last chapter will bring together these various topics to identify agribusinesses’ role in encouraging America’s contradictory vision of modern rurality and food production. Understanding that changes to the food and fiber system were dramatic and not altogether easy to market, these corporations deliberately crafted a nostalgic and romanticized view of agriculture to hide their growing power and control over an increasingly industrial and capitalistic food and fiber system. Utilizing powerful messages that emphasized rural imagery, family, and nostalgia, agribusinesses across the spectrum reassured an American public that the food system combined the wholesome nature they desired with the modern convenience and speed life now demanded.
We cannot hope to understand why and how the American food system operates without examining its historical elements. The postwar era was a period of great transition for many aspects of American society and the agricultural network was no different. The emergence of agribusiness created the context for many of the expectations we have today about the production and consumption of food and fiber. The ability to manipulate conceptions, to fundamentally change how people thought about farming and farmers, in turn entrenched agribusiness’ place within agriculture. Consolidation of these ideas helped engineer one of the most profound conceptual changes to America’s relationship with food. Aided by postwar circumstances, the average American became more willing to accept big business as an organic part of their lifestyle. It was a change that would have profound effects everyone far beyond the countryside.
CHAPTER TWO: “SO GOD MADE A FARMER:” HISTORY AND TIME IN
AGRIBUSINESS NARRATIVES

“God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bails, yet gentle enough to
tame lambs and wean pigs and tend the pink-combed pullets, who will stop his mower for an
hour to splint the broken leg of a meadow lark."

“It had to be somebody who’d plow deep and straight and not cut corners; somebody to seed,
weed, feed, breed and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk and
replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week’s work with a five-mile drive to church;
somebody who would bale a family together with the soft strong bonds of sharing, who would
laugh, and then sigh, and then reply, with smiling eyes, when his son says that he wants to spend
his life ‘doing what dad does.’"

“So God made a farmer.”

In 1978, radio personality and future presidential Medal of Freedom winner Paul Harvey
ended his speech for the Future Farmers of America with those words. An emotional tribute to
farmers, Harvey’s words symbolized a prominent theme in American cultural history. Farmers,
the first majority and last minority, hold a unique place in the country’s collective memory.
Though sometimes despised and ridiculed as ignorant, more often than not, the nation’s farmers
have been held up as the ideal Americans. They seem to represent so many of the qualities
venerated by American society: independence, virtue, work ethic, and democratic leadership.
Harvey’s speech exalted these traits, alluding to the notion that farmers were not just
“caretakers” of the land, but of the country as a whole. His speech, though heartfelt, fell in to
obscurity after the convention.

Fast forward to February 13, 2013, and the speech was reintroduced to the public in a
most unusual fashion. Harvey’s voice again reached millions of viewers, this time in the form of
a Chevrolet Ram truck Superbowl commercial. Featuring still pictures of tough looking farmers,
fields, and of course, trucks, “so God made a farmer” once again entered the American
consciousness. The Huffington Post called the ad poignant, Slate insisted it was the most striking
ad that night. Craig Hill, president of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, said the commercial left him teary eyed. But what was striking about Chrysler’s ad was not the emotional message, but rather how perfectly it encapsulated both America’s love affair with farming and the corporatization of these conceptions.

By creating such a commercial, Chrysler projected several impressions as actual facts. First, the company decided who exactly fit into their characterization of “farmer.” The advertisement featured an overwhelming number of white men, with rough-jawed, hat-wearing cowboys outnumbering women eighteen to five and non-white actors nineteen to three. Within the two minute clip, the commercial contained four religious scenes, five examples of heavy machinery, five skillfully plowed fields, and one blatantly obvious American flag floating in the breeze. From an analytical standpoint, it was easy to assume that Chrysler’s farmers were white men who were also religious, in possession of complex farm equipment, and toiled on many acres of rich soil. It was a characterization that many in America no doubt shared.

The second marketing coup the commercial accomplished was the association between farming and corporations. Ram trucks haul hay and animals. Case tractors, combines, and other equipment shell corn, plow fields, and sustain crops. These large machines symbolize the profession itself. It would be a small leap in logic to assume that without this equipment, farmers would be unable to perform their daily tasks. Companies, then, became a completely necessary

13 Today, both Case IH and Chrysler are owned by CNH Industrial, a large capital goods company based in the Netherlands.
institution to agriculture, their importance to the industry seemingly both innate and undeniable. It was a remarkable feat of marketing. Yet, this advertisement was not nearly as unique or innovative as it seems. The truth is that companies involved in agriculture have been playing on conceptions of farming and their own place in them for decades.

This chapter will explore how agribusinesses employed new interpretations of past, present, and future to both essentialize themselves to the agricultural process and introduce new standards to the rural community. An indispensable part of agribusiness' marketing strategy was their creation of a technologically-deterministic construction of time. Using their own origin stories, the past became a simple line of progress in which “special” businessmen helped create a better world for humanity. In turn, these corporate entities applied this reconstructed notion of time to current reality. In order to solve issues of depopulation, world hunger, and the fight against communism, agribusinesses argued that changes needed to be made in the postwar agricultural world. By adopting new standards of gendered labor, agricultural knowledge, and specialization, companies contended that farmers could then achieve a golden future that lacked the problems of the past but still had the virtues of yesteryear.

The composition of rural life and historic memory played a critical role in how agribusiness reconstituted its own place within the story of the agricultural past. By developing a mythology around their own foundation, companies sought to sell themselves as an essential part of agricultural progress. In line with a strong belief in technological determinism (an idea which will be explored later), these private businesses made the important choice to place their own origins within a deliberate moment of (what they claimed was) world-changing innovation, a leap in scientific and technological development. 

14 I am using the term technological determinism to describe a conceptual theory that human progress is driven by technological innovation and that this follows a predictable and inevitable path of advancement. For scholarship that
could claim agency and a natural predisposition for problem solving. They, and more subtly their products, would be associated with advancement. And even if companies could not definitively point to a single moment of invention, they could still claim a uniqueness in preparation, technique, or character. They succeeded because progress demanded it. This intersection between past, progress, and private enterprise was an important pillar in creating origin myths and also recreating temporal understandings of the past, the present, and the future.

For the most part, the origin myths of these agribusinesses followed a simple formula. A single man, possessing the necessary skills and virtues, created a business empire that solved problems and ultimately made the world a better place. One of the hallmarks of agribusinesses and their origins was the importance of a single character, a plucky protagonist whose own grit and determination helped him succeed where other men would fail. These men embodied the masculine traits that agribusiness hoped to impress upon farmers, including business acumen, efficiency, and support of industrial ideals. Moreover, the myths were equally vital to reinforcing the importance of private business to solving societal dilemmas. They showcased how capitalistic development was a natural sign of progress. Competition pushed businesses to solve major agricultural problems that plagued the world.

Out of all agricultural industries, the companies involved in farm equipment were the most devoted to the worship of the past and their place in it. This was partly because of the lengthy history of agricultural machinery. Unlike many of the major technological changes to farming, machinery had its start in the mid-nineteenth century, with companies selling reapers, binders, steel plows, and other equipment. International Harvester traced its origins all the way

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back to 1831. Its major competitor, John Deere, identified its founding just nine years later. But even more than their origin dates, farm equipment manufacturers used historic memory to reaffirm their own reputations as innovators or “makers” of history. John Deere maintained that its founder unlocked America’s full potential when he (and he alone) arrived on the Illinois prairie. Before then, the rich soils stymied all tools, waiting for the right man with the “combination of brains, skills, and inventiveness, and persistence to convert them into the most abundant horn of plenty the world has ever known.”

Then, like destiny, Deere unlocked the magic of the prairie and allowed for the creation of a prosperous American heartland. By tracing its foundation back to this moment, the company hid its own self-interest behind a banal display of human advancement and benefit. The corporation claimed it should be, “truly measured only by its contribution to the welfare and progress of the people.”

Not to be outdone by their main rival, International Harvester wove a competing tale of triumph and valor. The hero of their story was a bearded Virginian named Cyrus McCormick. Despite many failures and skeptics, McCormick eventually prevailed with the invention of the mechanical reaper. Leaning on the same principles as John Deere, International Harvester argued that, “probably no single invention has done more to change the conditions of life in the civilized world.”

Again, this highlighted the importance of private enterprise in “making” history. By downplaying the agency of other people or institutions, International Harvester reinforced the notion that historical change was the province of special men and in turn the companies they founded. Companies created progress, much like a point moving ever forward on a self-

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16 Ibid, 10.

determined line, and the masses (including farmers) then consumed these advancements. Like John Deere, International Harvester wanted customers to see them as a force of betterment. The corporation even used this association to claim protection over American wellbeing. In the face of growing Cold War tensions, the company published a pamphlet declaring that it existed to help maintain America’s strength. Not only did Harvester assist in food production, but its scientific and technological expertise stood ready to meet the country’s future needs. Even when the corporation made sacrifices, it had but, “one thought—the strength and preservation of free America must be served first!”18 The relationship between company enterprise and American improvement was an important link in agribusiness’ historic memory.

It was an association International Harvester guarded jealously, especially when other competitors threatened the company’s place in the market. In 1942, Ford Motor Company attempted to use wartime regulations to cut its competitors out of the farm equipment market all together. Appealing to the War Production Board, Ford argued that the production of a single tractor type (made by Ford of course) would allow for greater concentration on more pertinent war machines and increase the return of scrap metal for the war effort.19 Understandably, International Harvester was none too pleased at this recommendation. Howling about waste, unfairness, and inefficiency, the company took its complaints to anyone who would listen. Not only did the company point out Ford tractors’ lack of versatility, but they also appealed to the possibility of regression and harm to America’s future goals. The proposal, they claimed, did not take into account Harvester’s own campaign (for which they had received no revenue) to collect

18 “International Harvester, Men, Food and Machines” 1950, 1-3, Box 524, File 4532, International Harvester Central File.
19 Letter to Leon Henderson from J.L. McCaffrey, August 31, 1942, Box 551, File 1931, International Harvester Central File.
scrap metal, which had resulted in over one million tons of scrap for the war effort.\textsuperscript{20} Even more perilous was the certainty that this single tractor program would “jeopardize the Food for Freedoms.”\textsuperscript{21} Finally, joined by other implement dealers, International Harvester presented a list of counterarguments in Washington, D.C. Their primary argument against the proposal centered on the idea that the production of a single tractor type would waste valuable resources and limit operating efficiency. Instead, Harvester and the other manufacturers noted that a modern agricultural operation needed many different kinds of tractors to fulfill different tasks.\textsuperscript{22} And though Ford’s proposal was ultimately rejected by the government, its mere suggestion represented a serious threat to the metaphysical claims of International Harvester. Obviously the loss of wartime equipment sales would hurt, but the ideological implications were equally problematic. International Harvester claimed domain over agricultural innovation and progress. If they and their products could easily be replaced by a single Ford tractor, how important could the company be to the agricultural sector?

Outside of the farm equipment companies, the next industry most devoted to its own convoluted mythology was the seed corn companies. The development of hybrid seed was a long and multifaceted tale, featuring the combined efforts of both academics and businessmen.\textsuperscript{23} For individual seed corn companies, the myth-making formula remained mostly intact. An individual, with great talent, developed hybrids to help his fellow farmers. Funk Brothers Seed Company marked its beginning with Eugene Funk in 1901. Pfister Seed denoted its creation with

\textsuperscript{20} Letter to Lessing J. Rosenwald from J.L. McCaffrey, September 11, 1942, Box 551, File 1931, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{21} Letter to Leon Henderson from J.L. McCaffrey, August 31, 1942, Box 551, File 1931, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{22} Farm Machinery Manufacturers, “An analysis of the proposal to build only light tractors,” November 5, 1942, Box 551, File 1931, International Harvester Central File.
Lester Pfister in 1925. Even DeKalb, a joint association between local businessmen, farmers, and academics, held up individual heroes to honor. Yet, perhaps no person in the seed corn industry remained more venerated than Henry A. Wallace.

One of Iowa’s favorite sons, Wallace had an immeasurable impact on the industry. Long before he sold off his shares and became a world-famous politician, Wallace’s experimentation with plant breeding led to the founding of Pioneer Hi-Bred in 1926. Like the protagonists of other origin tales, Pioneer highlighted Wallace’s innovation but also the conspiratorial forces that attempted to hold back progress. Company legend testified that Iowa’s open pollinated seed producers attempted to bar Wallace’s hybrids from the state’s official yield test. Meeting like villains in the night, the producers argued, “this new-fangled corn was not practical because the farmer could not save his seed.”

Luckily, Wallace’s innovation caught the eye of several allies and Pioneer became the first seed company solely devoted to the research and production of hybrid corn. It was little wonder that Henry’s brother James, who would lead the company after Henry’s departure to Washington, remembered that his brother’s early concern was simply getting farmers to try hybrids. For he knew that hybrids, “would enable farmers all through the Corn Belt to profit from this exciting development.”

Again, businessmen became the holders of innovation. Resistance to their ideas and products held back natural progress, while acceptance could bring greater profits for both farmers and businesses alike.

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24 Pioneer, “A History of Pioneer’s First Ten Years,” undated, 15, Box 1, File 32, Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc., MS 542, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Hereafter known as Pioneer International.
26 It is important to note that I am using “businessmen” in a distinctively gendered manner. While many women were deeply involved in business decisions and production, dominant cultural attitudes dismissed their contributions and limited acknowledgement of their roles. As such, the realm of “business” was seen as specifically masculine.
Businesses in the meat industry also used origin myths to both redesign their place in American society and to separate themselves from competitors. Meat as a commodity bears a unique set of marketing opportunities and limitations. It is intrinsically tied to slaughter, its very creation entwined with death. As one advertising executive warned a meat producer, one must never imply that the company must kill to bring the product to the consumer.\textsuperscript{27} The process of preparation, slaughter, preservation, and the dissemination of meat was a massive investment of manpower and coordination. Moreover, because of its very nature, meat production deals with unique health risks. Meat packers face dangerous working conditions and the consumption of spoiled meat can result in sickness and death. No wonder customers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century demanded more regulation and transparency. Yet, despite many of the problems inherent to the industry, meat production and consumption have become an essential component of American society. In fact, even as more Americans moved away from rural areas and presumably the slaughter of their own meat, meat consumption rose annually. By 1960, Americans consumed more than two hundred pounds of meat per person per year.\textsuperscript{28} Due to this strange mixture, corporations involved in meat production needed customers to remove themselves, ideologically, emotionally, and physically, from the production process altogether. As scholar Susanne Freidberg noted, nineteenth century Chicago meatpackers, “convinced consumers, not only that fresh beef could come from far away, but also that their main relationship to meat--and indeed, to all once-living foods-- was as consumers.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29} Susanne Freidberg, \textit{Fresh: A Perishable History} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 65.
In turn, corporations could then display their enterprise as the only producer of healthful and wholesome meat. Their innovations represented progress away from the major problems of the past, their actions provided continuous safe access to this commodity. Company origin stories, using a similar myth-making formula, helped solidify this theme in the eyes of customers. Hormel claimed that its founder, George A. Hormel, demanded excellence from the very beginning. Consequently, “for over three quarters of a century, the heritage of the Hormel Company has been based upon strict adherence to quality.” Rath Packing Company asserted a similar position, maintaining that early company leadership allowed them to become one of the pioneers in the industry.

Perdue Chicken was especially good at drawing connections between historic memory and their own company contributions to the larger industry. When nominating their founder (and father of the then current president) Arthur Perdue to the American Poultry Historical Society’s Hall of Fame, the company played up his importance as a chicken industry visionary. Despite starting from humble roots, Arthur Perdue’s integrity and sound management allowed him to transform a flock of fifty white leghorns into “one of the world’s largest integrated poultry producing companies.” One supporter attributed the growth in consumer confidence in chicken to Arthur’s company’s work. The supporter noted the overall importance of the company’s founder, writing, “The story he symbolizes, and the story his company tells to the customer, is one in which all of us can be proud because it constantly reminds the marketplace of the

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30 Hormel, “Hormel Product Lines,” 1971-1972, 10, Series 1, File 43, Box 1, Rath Packing Company Records, MS 562, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Hereafter known as Rath Packing Company Records.
goodness of our products.” Each one of these corporations drew the line between private business and historical innovation, between the problems of the past and solutions offered by corporations. They placed themselves as the holders and producers of new knowledge and ingenuity, which led to the production of a clean and wholesome product.

Even a company that lacked historical agricultural background sought to create a comparable legend. Though today it is one of the most visible agricultural corporations, Monsanto only turned to agriculture forty years after its inception. But this did not stop the company from deifying its founder or touting its own importance to American society. Company literature painted an ideal image of founder John Francis Queeny, chronicling his rise to success through an unwillingness to admit defeat. Due to his determination, Monsanto’s, “character was permanently shaped by his unwavering insistence on supplying honest goods at a fair price.”

This infusion ultimately instilled the company with the need to help answer many questions about the human condition. Monsanto even aided in the triumph of America itself, using “its pioneering progress in both human relations and productive efficiency,” to make the country the most successful nation in world history.

Unlike other agribusinesses in the postwar period though, Monsanto lacked the agricultural pedigree to play on. They could not specifically point to historic agricultural innovation or flaunt their long history of aiding rural communities. Instead, the company altered the myth-making formula to fit its own needs. Queeny and the company’s importance remained, but the development of Monsanto’s agricultural division received a new and improved storyline.

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34 Hubert Kay, “Monsanto and the American Idea: First Draft,” June 1958, P-1, Series 6, Box 1, File 4, Monsanto Company Records, University Archives, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri. Hereafter Known as Monsanto Collection.
Corporate scientists of the 1940s, now the secondary heroes of this plotline, helped win the war while solving major agricultural issues. DDT killed disease-spreading bugs on the battlefield and then destroyed them on the farm. The company argued that they stood on the frontline in the battle against famine and hunger. Corporate chemicals aided “the American farmer in his redoubled efforts to allay the famine which threatens one-fourth of the world's population.”

Monsanto’s modern mythmaking even highlighted the formula’s focus on resolve after failure. When the corporation’s soil conditioner failed on the open market (which they attributed to over-exuberant expectations by customers), Monsanto reaffirmed its commitment to agricultural progress by adding personnel, constructing new testing grounds, and eventually creating their own Agricultural Division.

Ultimately, the creation of mythology represented corporate attempts to reconstitute historical reality. Changing the past helped companies sell a new version of the future. It was a tactic that had worked well for other private businesses. As historian Mike Wallace showed, Disney was especially good at using the past to further corporate goals. The fact that so many agribusinesses made such a concerted effort to reinterpret the past (that is, deliberately pointing out their products as the most important innovation in human progress) demonstrated the power of historic memory. History itself became a marketing tool, another way to validate corporate sway over agriculture. Through this interpretation of the past, companies could then imply that historical change was a simple product of technological-determinism, a natural avenue of human advancement. Within corporate interpretations, problems of the past (from insects to famine)

36 Monsanto, “Feed Bin Science: American Tables Benefit when Chemistry Joins Hands with the Farmer,” Monsanto Magazine 26, no. 4, (September 1946), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
continuously plagued humankind until the appearance of a special individual and later his company. These companies “solved” the problem through the use of science and technology, which could really only be used by large institutions possessing the capabilities and expertise. Disney used this tactic to imply that capitalism would lead consumers towards a golden future. Agribusinesses constructed new historical memories to make their corporations essential to the story of the past, present, and future.

**Problems of the Postwar World**

But while these companies used historical analysis to reorient their place in the story of the past, they also harnessed the environmental and political reality of the postwar period to induce modifications to America’s agricultural system. They did this by showcasing the need for the agricultural system to change to meet these new and pressing needs. In fact, a key component of agribusiness’ manipulation of time was to spark this transformation. Corporations desired changes in agriculture. They wanted farmers to adopt more industrial, capitalistic methods of agriculture because they would then need corporate inclusion to function. So, along with their emphasis on corporate involvement in past agricultural progress, companies also accentuated how current problems required change. These issues, they claimed, were new and unprecedented, truly global in scope. Therefore, these problems required deep structural alterations to the agricultural industry. They argued that farmers needed to alter their techniques to deal with the growing problems of radical political ideology, world famine, and population growth. And of course, agribusinesses would be there to lead to charge, using their expertise to solve the problems that plagued humanity.

The context of the Cold War proved to be a most helpful ally in this quest. Fear of communism crept into many aspects of American society, including food politics. Policy-makers
in Washington began to view food, more specifically lack thereof, as a recipe for communist insurgency. Nations of the “third world” were vulnerable to revolution when faced with a crisis, especially famine. Consequently, America needed to ensure proper agricultural development to keep these countries from going red. What resulted was a strange intertwining of federal policy, technocratic diplomacy, and capitalism. American experts disagreed on the kind of aid they should offer. Some preferred sending agricultural specialists, others believed in creating specialized breeding projects. A few even believed in direct food programs. Increased production at home would therefore both aid countries facing food crises and create future markets for American goods. Trying to reassure any reluctant participants, Senator George McGovern argued that these programs were as much about humanitarian efforts as they were about creating international markets for US processed foods. Whatever its form, “food aid” became an ideological weapon for agribusinesses desiring changes to the food and fiber industry. One local farm club was so giddy at the prospect, they sent Frank Perdue a letter emphasizing how this new food policy would help, “all fields of agriculture such as machinery, fertilizer, processing, transportation as well as the farmers themselves.” By emphasizing the problems of the developing world, companies could then present themselves, their expertise, their products, and their vision of agriculture as the solution.

Anxiety over communism affected not just political sentiments but also many cultural standards. Private companies, as stewards of free enterprise, were both the frontline soldiers in the war against the left and propagandists for the benefits of capitalism. Agribusinesses were

41 Letter to Tidewater Farm Club Members from E. Bayly Oren and Mark Welsh, October 6, 1965, Box 33, File 347, Perdue Records.
especially keen on exploiting the threat of a global communist takeover. Monsanto produced a number of industrial films, for internal and external use, meant to warn Americans against leftist encroachments. *Crossroads for America* showed the timeline for possible communist destruction of US democracy. *Going Places* emphasized the need for the profit motive in economic development. In one particularly revealing case, the film *Backfire* chronicled a debate between a high school student and her father about the nature of the economy. After arguing against free enterprise, the father realized (in a dramatic climax) that he had accidently picked up on the “planted phrases of the Communist Party.”

This desire to battle communist forces eventually flowered into the company-sponsored TV series *Conquest,* a science-themed show intended to spark interest in scientific progress. Presented on CBS and donated to a select number of schools, the show encouraged more young people to enter the field of science and thus, “keep the country in the race for scientific supremacy.” After all, any deviation could result in the Soviet Union holding the advantage.

It was this interlocking of science, the power of private enterprise, and Cold War ideology that agribusinesses used on farm communities to advocate for agricultural changes. Rath created a demonstration swine farm in part to show farmers how to keep “fine meat for the American table.” International Harvester claimed that greater use of its tractors would protect American free enterprise and national security. John Deere later echoed this, claiming that

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42 Letter from James Reebe to all members of the advertising, public relations, and plant and sales office, September 9, 1955, “Monsanto film catalog,” 1-5, Series 1, Box 6, File 14, Monsanto Collection.  
43 Ibid, 2.  
44 Monsanto Public Relations Department, News Release, October 4, 1957, Series 1, Box 1, File 2, Monsanto Collection.  
more of their machines sold because protein had become a social necessity rather than a luxury.\textsuperscript{47} Monsanto clearly argued that the key to greater production was the application of scientific knowledge to farming.\textsuperscript{48} Science, harnessed by these large corporations, created products that would help farmers defend America against the forces of communist destruction.

But it was not enough for these companies to aid farmers in this quest; they also had to show why communism was a poor choice for agricultural advancement. To do this, companies often compared American agriculture to Soviet collectivization. Among Frank Perdue’s research papers, one untitled essay claimed that only capitalism could create an agricultural system that produced high standards of living. Communist planners, on the other hand, worked against human nature itself, taking the profit motive away from their farmers. Laughing in the face of catastrophic famines, the unknown author gloated that the Russians or Red Chinese would love to have the American “problem of what to do with food surpluses.”\textsuperscript{49} Pioneer’s Roswell Garst, though more measured in his take, also argued that Russian agriculture failed in comparison to the rapid advancements of America’s farms. Garst believed that Soviet lack of production could be attributed to a basic deficiency in mechanization or chemical use. American farms, he noted, needed only thirteen percent of population to produce enough food (and more) to feed the country. Russia, on the other hand, required seventy percent because of its inferior organization and lack of scientific improvements. Hopefully, he concluded, they would finally realize how costly aggression could be. Only when they put aside their “inferiority complex” would world peace and agricultural prosperity be possible.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} International Harvester, “Riding the Farm Boom,” October 27, 1973, Box 551, File 08816, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{48} Monsanto, “Your Food and Chemical Research,” May 1953, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{49} Perdue, “Untitled—Forces of Change,” 1-7, Box 34, File 359, Perdue Chicken Records.
\textsuperscript{50} Letter to All Salesmen from Roswell Garst, October 31, 1955, 1-4, Box 3, File 32, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
Another prominent trope exploited by agribusiness was the specter of global famine. This well-travelled bogeyman had its origins long before the postwar manipulations of private businesses. Progressive reformers in the early twentieth century worried that America’s countryside would not be up to the task of feeding its growing population. Agricultural experts in other nations, including the Russian Empire and later Soviet Union, emphasized this fear to drive home the need for scientific and technological reforms. Two devastating world wars seemed to only deepen the need for increased production by American farmers. Still, this idea received new life with the geo-politics of the Cold War and the very real famines taking place across the globe.\footnote{The mid-twentieth witnessed some of the worst famines in human history, with events in China (1959-61, estimated fifteen to forty million dead), India (1943, estimated five million dead), Soviet Union (famines in 1932, 1941, and 1947, estimated ten to fifteen million dead), and other places leading to millions of deaths.}

Taking advantage of these material crises, agribusinesses exploited these events to sell their products and agricultural system as real solutions to an overpopulated and increasingly underfed world. According to these businesses, both a booming world population and the possibility of communist infiltration drove an urgent need for greater American agricultural production. As Monsanto’s annual 1962 review remarked, “As the world’s population increases, the problems of feeding it grow more urgent. With much of the human race already undernourished, man must make his farms more productive and his food processing and preserving more efficient.”\footnote{Monsanto, “Annual Review: 1962,” 1962, 2, Series 8, Box 7, Monsanto Collection.}

C. Robert Myers, president of the Myers Sherman Company (a grain processing manufacturer) and member of the Food for Peace council, argued that the world faced enormous levels of hunger and malnutrition.\footnote{C. Robert Myers, “Agricultural Explosion Address,” undated, 2-3, Box 34, File 358, Perdue Chicken Records.} Roswell Garst sent a letter to his salesmen claiming that the world troubles came more from the, “savagery that comes from hunger than to
any other cause.” Peace, John Deere declared, only came through the production of plenty. Of course, the possible increase in agricultural production corresponded nicely with consumption of more agricultural inputs.

To meet this need, companies argued that American farmers needed to adopt new techniques and new products that would in turn feed the world’s growing population. In many ways the chemical industry, though somewhat new to the field of agricultural research and application, had the most to gain. One pamphlet published by the Manufacturing Chemists Association claimed that chemistry could remove hunger from the world, that “famine and misery can be drastically reduced if we can continue to increase acreage yields.”

Firman Bear, a world-renowned soil expert, wrote, “The fertilizer industry represents the most important advance ever made towards providing plenty of food for the peoples of earth.” Later, he concluded that, “Without their use, the problem of adequately meeting the food needs of the world's 2 billion people is essentially insolvable.” Fertilizer, herbicide, insecticide, and other chemical compounds became indispensable for feeding the world’s teeming masses.

Monsanto quickly latched on to this idea, deploying it as a justification for new farming practices, which including an increased dependence on their product line. Santobane, the product name for Monsanto’s DDT, became a soldier in the war against hunger, “helping the American farmer in his redoubled efforts to allay the famine.” The power of science, created by corporate chemists and then wielded by farmers, could reduce world hunger. All along, Monsanto

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54 Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, August 21, 1958, Box 6, File 70, Perdue Eastern Division Records.
56 “Your Food and Chemical Research,” Manufacturing Chemists’ Association, May, 1953, 1-5, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
57 Firman Bear, “Food and Fertilizer,” Fertilizer Review, as reprinted in Right Off The Cob!, 5, no. 8 (September 1950): 4-5, Series 10, Box 2, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
58 Monsanto, “Feed Bin Science: American Tables Benefit when Chemistry Joins Hands with the Farmer,” Monsanto Magazine 26, no. 4 (September 1946): 10-12, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
presented itself and its products as key contributors to this battle. One Monsanto advertisement argued that “why should they [insects] feast while millions hunger?” Farmers no longer had to “stand by” as insects devoured food that could feed the world’s masses.59 Weeds, too, could be destroyed. No longer, Monsanto articulated, would the “green death” steal food or profits from mankind.60

Eventually, the company began to expand its message beyond America’s own borders. In 1966, they invited delegates from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Committee’s Rice Commission to a demonstration on herbicide application without “highly sophisticated equipment,” the assumption being that the herbicide could help feed countries that lacked the basics of agricultural industrialization.61 Just a year earlier, the company boasted of how the opening of a Monsanto Agricultural Center in Guatemala would boost area farm productivity through its supply of fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, and feed supplements. The business’s annual report maintained, “As populations continue to swell, farm chemicals seem destined to play a mounting role in heading off famine.”62 It was a message that only grew more prominent with the green revolution hitting its stride in the seventies and eighties. More recently, Monsanto and other Big Ag corporations continued to push this message as a sales tactic. As Monsanto’s website declared in 1998, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? 10 billion by 2030.” The company proclaimed limited agricultural technology would not produce the yield needed to feed the burgeoning population. Ten years later, the company (along with others) rebranded fear over famine as “food security.” Issuing a commitment to help double yields by 2030, the chemical

59 Monsanto, “Why should they feast while millions hunger,” Monsanto Magazine 27, no. 1 (February 1948), 1, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
60 Monsanto, “Green Death,” Monsanto Magazine 27, no. 4 (August 1948): 20-21, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
giant argued that access to their improved seeds and guided agronomic practices were key elements to achieving this goal. No wonder they claimed to pursue “solutions to help our growing world.”

But this chemical corporation was hardly the only company to use this “feed the world” tactic to sell its products to farmers and policy-makers alike. Pioneer Hi-bred often employed global population growth and “world hunger” to sell their hybrids in an over saturated commodity market. It justified Pioneer’s support to end the American Soil Bank program and acreage restrictions, claiming the company believed world hunger to be a major problem that more hybrid corn could solve. In 1958, with an agricultural recession taking a toll on commodity prices, Pioneer’s Roswell Garst reassured farmers not to worry about surpluses, pointing to growing world population as insurance against poor food prices. Just four years later, Garst again assured his salesmen that America’s food excess, once the bane of the agricultural industry, was actually a blessing in disguise. Without overproduction, Roswell argued, America would be unable to feed itself and the rest of the world after 1980.

By focusing on world hunger, Pioneer and other companies could then readjust the story of surpluses, changing them from a major agricultural problem to a public benefit. Even as farmers were increasingly squeezed by rising capital costs and falling food prices, surpluses became a vague strawman for increased production and therefore greater consumption of agricultural inputs. As one Pioneer company article claimed, “We don't have an over-supply of agricultural commodities such as corn, wheat, cotton, and milk…no, we've got a distribution

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64 Letter to Salesmen, August 21, 1958, Box 6, File 70, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
65 Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, December 29, 1959, Box 8, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
problem that needs to be improved to meet the needs of our time. With half the people of the world going to bed with empty stomachs, this becomes a statement of fact!"67 In the simplest of terms, agribusinesses argued that the world needed more food, so farmers needed to keep up their production by adopting the techniques and products espoused by these companies. To meet these world needs, they would have to become the farmers agribusinesses always intended them to be: efficient, business-like, and above all, consumers.

Surpluses, along with other pesky and persistent agricultural issues, became just another opportunity to be exploited by agribusinesses looking to essentialize their place in farming. After all, farmers in the postwar period faced a number of different challenges. While the Second World War had been a major boon to farmers throughout the country, price supports on food commodities soon disappeared. This led to fluctuating prices and rather slow growth of farm income. Rural depopulation, a worry since the early twentieth century, suddenly became a more pressing issue. Between 1936 and 1959, an estimated 19 million people left farming. This decline continued between 1950 and 1980, as the farm population fell from 23 to 5.6 million. The deteriorating labor force and inconsistent commodity prices, combined with climbing operating costs, drove many away from agriculture all together.68 With this context in mind, agribusinesses urged farmers to see private companies as purveyors of necessary expertise to solve these population issues.

These businesses were certainly not the only force to argue that postwar agricultural reality required changes to farming. Everyone from editors of large agricultural newspapers to

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USDA officials and land-grant academics warned that the market mandated changes. Farmers would have to adapt or be forced out of agriculture. For the editors of Successful Farming, one of the largest and most widely read of the agricultural journals, that was not necessarily a bad thing. They reasoned that the small farmers who left meant that, “commercial farmers will have more of the market for themselves. The proverbial pie can be cut into fewer but bigger pieces.”

Others believed that the price squeeze itself was an important instrument of necessary economic culling. Paul Johnson, the editorial director of Prairie Farmer, reasoned that the price squeeze had actually done farmers a great deal of good, forcing them to increase their productivity, adopt new technology, and make agriculture more of a business and less of a lifestyle. Academics like John A. Hopkins, professor of agricultural economics, agreed. He maintained that the number of farms was declining because “traditional agriculture” failed to orient itself towards the new market. Seth Shaw, a retailer for Safeway Foods, echoed this opinion, stating that farmers who failed to integrate could not compete with their larger and more efficient neighbors.

Perhaps the reality of the situation was best summed up by the president of the Delmarva Poultry Industry, A.E. Bailey. He noted that the farming industry required adjustments and that, “anyone who refuses to change with it will be out of business or go broke.”

Like the fight against communist forces and the need to feed the world, companies reasoned that the postwar agricultural landscape required massive changes in the way farmers

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operated. Rural depopulation and growing urban population needs required more yield with less labor. Therefore, they billed agribusiness and their products as labor saving, profit-making rescuers for besieged farming communities. Perdue Chicken pledged that their contract growing and hatching programs would allow many “good” farmers to remain in agriculture. The company claimed that their expertise and knowledge actually helped with local farm management problems. It was a critical advantage that most independent poultry producers lacked access to and thus failed to produce quality products.\textsuperscript{74} Monsanto avowed that both their products and expert knowledge would help farmers improve their methods and profit margins. The company even created a new position in 1965 specifically to advise farmers on how to properly use their evolving product line.\textsuperscript{75} Pioneer boasted that the company’s record sales showcased the superiority of their hybrids, claiming that farmers in 1963, “who planted Pioneer have just had greater profit and greater pleasure.”\textsuperscript{76} Implement companies like International Harvester were especially keen on demonstrating the labor saving power of their machines. Harvester’s Farmall Cub, which first appeared late in the Second World War, flaunted its power of mechanization for all farms large and small. They even claimed that the Cub would stop the, “tendencies towards putting the nation's agricultural lands in fewer hands, by giving increased competitive strength to farmers working in smaller-size farm units.”\textsuperscript{77} Agribusinesses wanted farmers to see their products as basic components of operating a farm in the postwar era. The agricultural market had changed, they maintained. Now, farmers needed to change with it or suffer the consequences.

**Expertise and Labor**

\textsuperscript{74} Frank Perdue, “Speech for the Bankers Meeting,” 1964, 2-4, Box 33, File 338, Perdue Chicken Records.  
\textsuperscript{75} Monsanto Public Relations Department, “News Release,” January 26, 1965, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection  
\textsuperscript{76} Letter to Salesmen, October 31, 1963, Box 9, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.  
\textsuperscript{77} International Harvester, “International Harvester Presents its Post-war Farm Machines,” October 1945, 2-4, Box 524, File 11458, International Harvester Central File.
But what exactly were these new standards that agribusinesses wanted farmers to adopt? Some were rather obvious. All companies strived to increase their sales numbers. So, anything that involved greater consumption of input goods (chemicals, seeds, machines, etc.) was a win-win for agribusinesses. Yet companies did not just push for farmers to buy their products, but for deep structural alterations to agriculture. They did not want customers simply to buy their products, but to fundamentally change their methods to better fit a system that benefited large corporations. They sought the greater capitalization of agriculture. This meant a movement away from diversification, a greater emphasis on production and yields, more acres, the commodification of agricultural expertise, and more defined labor and gender standards.

A push to increase production across the board was perhaps the most obvious change advocated by agribusiness. Despite persistent issues surrounding overproduction, agricultural companies insisted that farmers deliver greater and greater yields and livestock numbers. Whether for profit, global altruism, the fight against communism, or simply survival, agribusinesses affirmed that increased production was a necessary measure for farmers to take. As Monsanto observed, “The need is apparent: farmer must produce more per acre and more per man hour to meet the ever-increasing demands of today’s economy.”78 Roswell Garst of Pioneer proclaimed that, “from now on the U.S.A. needs to produce 4,000,000,000 bushels of corn as an average and that we have only done it once in history!”79

Of course, the reason behind agribusinesses’ support of increased production had a lot to do with their own private benefit. In order to increase production, farmers had to rely on the products of agribusinesses. Chemical fertilizers restored soil fecundity while herbicides and

insecticides destroyed yield-stealing weeds and pests. Mechanized equipment allowed greater row standardization and precision. New implements permitted farmers to plant and harvest more quickly. Specialized hybrids, including corn, alfalfa, cotton, and other plants, returned greater yields. This was especially true of hybrid corn. Because of their biological nature, hybrid seeds had to be purchased every year. In the end, increased production relied heavily on the input products of agribusiness. Thus, farmers had to rely on these companies as well.

For meat producing companies like Perdue, Hormel, and Rath, increased production had more to do with the desire for more product at a cheaper price. Frank Perdue told his Delmarva customers at the company’s yearly barbeque that increased broiler production would keep the company in business (and the industry away from southern competitors) for years to come.80 Two academics from the Harvard School of Business concurred with this idea, noting that new efficiencies in production gave the broiler industry greater price appeal than previous years.81 However, sometimes production could not keep up with demand. Herbert Frank, the president of the Washington Beef Company, expressed his frustration to Frank Perdue. He bemoaned the lack of production, “Our only problem has been that we have a tiger by the tail. We have not been able to get sufficient product to fill our demand.”82 Rath Packing Company specifically suffered from a volatile pork production market. One Rath executive acknowledged that the company’s emphasis on pork products limited the company’s possible revenue, forcing them to put all their eggs in one proverbial basket. This made them vulnerable to hog shortages, which in turn would force the company to operate at a loss.83 Earle Ludgin & Company, a firm hired in 1965 to

revamp Rath’s marketing strategies, recognized that the company’s irregular growth was in part due to problematic hog production.\textsuperscript{84} It was hardly surprising then that the company supported 4-H and FFA projects, Iowa State University feeding trials, and other potentially production enhancing programs for farmers. The company desperately needed more consistent production to continue their operation.

The movement away from farm diversification towards specialization was another labor change that agribusinesses tried to impress upon farmers.\textsuperscript{85} This took on many forms, from emphasizing specific crop selection to limiting breeds of livestock. For meat packers, particularly pork, the adoption of new breeding and feeding methods on farms were critical for their own market viability. Changing consumer demand in the postwar age forced many processors to adopt new standards. Demand for plumper and whiter (or golden) chicken breasts drove Perdue and others to adopt new criteria of breeding, feeding, and evisceration.\textsuperscript{86} The growing American appetite for beef encouraged packers to insist on feed additives and steroids in cattle. But out of all meat packers, pork especially needed their farmers to change their approaches to hog production.

Pork, once the most popular meat in America, suffered from waning consumer demand. After the Second World War, more and more buyers desired lean rather than fatty meat. This, coupled with the lingering association between pork, disease, and low class status (as well as the loss of lard as a critical secondary industry), damaged the industry. Facing a crisis, pork processors needed to make changes throughout the production and consumption process.

Collaborating with land grants and the extension service, various pork producers launched a widespread educational campaign aimed at both housewives and farmers. Agricultural scientists introduced new techniques for discerning the hog’s fat and meat content. Home economists and food columnists encouraged new cooking methods and recipes, hoping to reeducate housewives on more appetizing ways to cook pork. When targeting farmers, agribusinesses and their allies looked to transform the basic biology of hogs, attempting to add more muscle without increasing fat content.  

The conversion of hogs from lard to meat-type represented a clear labor change that agribusinesses and their allies desired from farmers. In order to drive home this need for change, companies utilized the possibility of increased profit margins as an attractive gambit to entice hog farmers. Better prices were especially appealing given the growing overhead (antibiotics, feed additives, and building costs) of confinement farming, a system that became standard practice in the postwar period. Companies like Rath and Hormel often offered premiums to farmers who produced hogs with more weight for desirable cuts in the haunches and stomach. The hope was that these meat-type hogs would help keep pork as an essential part of the American diet and, in turn, help packers would stay in business.  

Yet, even as companies desired farmers to alter their hog farming practices, they also made it clear that only through the acceptance of agribusinesses’ own expertise and advice could these larger changes actually occur. Hormel claimed that its support for “forward-looking” programs served the farmer by helping him produce a better product.  


company livestock experts directly to farmers to “help solve their livestock management and marketing problems.” They also created a company swine farm (a tactic similar to those of hybrid seed companies) to demonstrate the exact modern and scientific standards they wanted their producers to use.\(^90\) It was crucial that these packers reconstituted who possessed the agency of change, the spirit of innovation. They certainly exploited their relationship with land grant colleges, extension services, and trade organizations to display their own professional authority. Rath namedropped Iowa State University when discussing scientific breeding, Hormel crowed about their sponsorship of the National Barrow and Midwest Steer Shows.\(^91\) And though tension between corporations and public institution sometimes showed, more often corporations formed an integral part of the web of expertise.

Ultimately, the support for changes in agricultural practices fell under another important theme of agribusiness’ new vision of agriculture: the restructuring of expertise and authority away from the farm and farmer and towards the firms themselves. They marketed that it was corporations, not producers, which understood what was needed for a modern agricultural system to work. This was a careful line that many others had attempted to walk before, with some successes and many failures.\(^92\) Yet these agricultural firms had a different goal than earlier reformers and academics who wanted to reform rural communities. Rural depopulation was not a primary source of anxiety for these firms. Nor did they, for the most part, worry about issues of overproduction or falling farm income. For agribusinesses, gaining acceptance of their authority

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\(^90\) Rath Packing Company “Sales Training: Agricultural Activities,” 5-6, Series 8, Box 22, File 4, Rath Packing Company Records.


was the key to essentializing large corporations to the agricultural system. By defining a new space of expert knowledge *owned* specifically by corporations, agribusinesses helped create a barrier of seemingly critical information to which most farmers did not have access. Therefore, in order to reach this web of expertise and keep the farm competitive, farmers needed to accept the help (and authority) of these firms. Agribusinesses then played the role of the gatekeeper and teacher of necessary agricultural knowledge.

This corporate commodification of agricultural information was a vital part agribusinesses’ marketing plan. In order for corporations to make themselves indispensable, they needed to train America’s farmers about how to properly farm in a modern, industrial system that best fit corporate desires, a system that used corporate products and information. In many ways, the path had already been laid out for businesses. New fields of study like agricultural engineering and management had helped professionalize knowledge.93 Government agencies like extension and experiment stations moved authority from farmers to government agents, from the field to the lab. Land grant schools informed farmers of new experiments and techniques that would change their work. Agricultural businesses of the early twentieth century had helped formulate the industrial ideal in the country.94 But for the first time, agribusinesses took a leading role as a holder of knowledge and a gatekeeper.

In fact, even a practice as simple as tinkering could be interpreted as a threat to corporate control and expertise. It was not just the fear that farmers would possibly damage their expensive tractors by repairing their own machine that motivated agribusinesses. The real corporate issue with tinkering, fixing, and otherwise interfering with these implements was that it helped

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separate the farming operation from the companies themselves, making their continued service and advice essentially unnecessary. Farmers who fixed their own machines did not need companies, which flew in the face of everything the businesses wanted. No wonder International Harvester warned their customers against meddling with their own equipment. One promotional postcard argued that a faulty carburetor could ruin efficiency and “tinkering only makes it worse.”95 Another remarked that tractor service was a job for a specialist and not to “let anyone tamper with it except the trained.”96 By trained, the company meant corporate sanctioned and controlled employees. It was another attempt by corporations to regulate activities that were once considered secondary farm labor. “Tinkering” became obsolete in favor of company provided service.

One of the elements of this commodification and reorientation of knowledge was the role agricultural companies’ basic development and research played in solving the agricultural problems of the day. Agribusinesses were quick to display the benefits of their own internal research to America’s agricultural sector. John Deere boasted that its years of exhaustive research had given the farmer more work capacity, efficiency, comfort, and convenience.97 Not to be outdone, its rival International Harvester claimed that each of their implements was, “the result of inspired inventive genius and endless research,” reflecting the American creed of efficiency.98 The company even went as far as to assert that its research and production stood not just as a bulwark of agricultural progress, but also the “traditional American way” of free

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enterprise and national security! Monsanto would also build on the connection between capitalism, national defense, and food production. In one 1946 article in the company magazine, Monsanto bragged that its products would solve major environmental issues for America’s farmers, including fertilization, crop disease, and insect damage. The corporation especially touted DDT, arguing that its ability as an insecticide was nothing short of miracle. Monsanto routinely demonstrated its robust research acumen to farmers, so much so that it became one of the pillars of their marketing strategy. As Edmund Greene, a company marketing administrator, once remarked, “marketing means simply finding a farmer’s commercial problems and trying to find a solution for them in chemicals.” Of course, the point of this strategy and the reasons for the whole representation of research prowess was ultimately to get farmers to change their labor patterns.

Perhaps no example showcased this more than Pioneer’s attempt to halt the production of hay in favor of hybrid corn. Leading the charge were Roswell and David Garst, the colorful father and son owners of Garst and Thomas Seed (a division of Pioneer) and part of one of the most famous farming families in America. The Garsts were especially relentless acolytes of scientific agriculture. Their own farm in Coon Rapids, Iowa doubled as a demonstration plot for new technologies, new practices, and, of course, hybrid seed. Given their monetary stake and desire to reform agricultural practices, the custom of haying was a particular irritation to the pair. As early as 1954, Roswell declared that he could feed his fifteen thousand head of cattle with just

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100 Monsanto, “Farmers in Fatigues,” Monsanto Magazine 25, no. 1 (1946) 18-20, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
corn cobs and molasses, making the hay rotation obsolete. Ten years later, David wrote in an article on feed grain farming, “Today the use of hay is unnecessary. The cobs and stover can be balanced better and cheaper with commercially available supplements—to make a superior feed.”

However, despite their lengthy marketing battle, it seemed that many farmers were unwilling to quit the practice all together. In response to David’s article (which he sent out to all subdivisions of the company), Eastern Division’s general manager Robert Woods commended him for his attempt to change labor patterns in the face of continued resistance.

In spite of all of your facts, figures and experience, which definitely show that there are cheaper feeds by far than hay, there's still a whale of a lot of farmers that evidently want to make hay. It's hard to understand why they are reluctant to change that practice when many farmers today are making rapid changes in their past practices.

Back in Iowa, Roswell lamented the fact that more farmers did not use corn cobs as feed, as he argued it was cheaper and easier to maintain than hay or alfalfa. He bemoaned the lack of education by land-grants and extension, then urged his dealers to “be a service to our customers, and to the farmers of your community, by telling them how they can get by with no hay at all.”

Whether it was due to pressure by seed corn companies or other factors, hay production (along

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104 David Roswell, “Cow and Calves on a Feed Grain Farm,” June 1964, 4, Box 9, File 32, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
with other diverse crops) continued to fall throughout the forties, fifties, and sixties. This led to the elimination of horses and cows on many farms.

Despite gradual changes to crop production, one of the reasons why farmers might have been so reluctant to change their rotation was due to the place of haying in their historical memory as farmers and as men. Hay, mainly because of its fodder properties, was a mainstay in farms across America. Like threshing (though not nearly as labor-extensive), haying was a communal activity that required several hands to move it from the field to the barn. Even with the introduction of new technologies that saved time and labor, farmers could still use the crop to identify with the masculine past. As Roswell himself recognized, “you fellows are “haying next summer—and you’ll want to hay—your grandfather hayed—your father hayed—and it’s a good established custom.” Haying, like a generational farmstead, was a critical tie between current reality and the mythical past. Regardless of the changes in technology, a farmer still practiced something that his ancestors did, therefore reinforcing his own status as a male and as a steward of the land. Unsurprisingly, there was resistance to giving up this practice. Giving up haying asked farmers to substitute a proven crop with an unknown future. For farmers, abandoning haying was a removal of one connection to the virtuous past. Roswell even acknowledged that he was trying to “disturb” his fellow farmers, getting them use their own initiative. To aid in this endeavor, Roswell dangled a carrot of middle class leisure. While others would be haying, Roswell claimed that he would be fishing. This allusion, made so casually, was a common tactic among agribusinesses hoping to entice changes. It softened the ideological blow of

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109 Ibid, 7.
abandoning past practices by showcasing benefits of adopting new operations: enjoying the leisure time of the burgeoning middle class.\textsuperscript{110}

**Gender: A Realm of Limits**

Out of all of the changes that agribusinesses attempted to impress upon farming communities, a reorientation of gender expectations and roles may have been the most profound. As scholars of have shown, gender roles and expectations in the rural context were much more fluid than in most urban spaces. Women performed any and all tasks necessary to insure the homestead’s success. Men sometimes took on “feminine” roles of cooking, cleaning, baking, and sewing. Ultimately, survival trumped all cultural standards, no matter how unpleasant or unseemly. Likewise, community bonds often gave rural women a greater social power that many of their urban sisters lacked. Kinship networks, so critical the individual farmstead’s success, often depended on the connections between women.\textsuperscript{111}

However, the postwar period exhibited a number of changes to the gendered features of rural life. Like with other tasks, outside forces had long attempted to reshape how rural men and women interacted and performed their gendered identity. Progressive reformers involved in the Country Life and eugenics movements attempted a radical reconstruction of rural gender in the early twentieth century. Reflecting the hetero-normativity of urban spaces, these reformers campaigned against “country vices” of homosexuality, gender ambiguity, and other rural non-conformist measures.\textsuperscript{112} Other organizations, like 4-H, FFA and the Farm Bureaus, became

\textsuperscript{110} For more information on agriculture and haying, see, Steven R. Hoffbeck, *The Haymakers: A Chronicle of Five Farm Families* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2000).

\textsuperscript{111} A number of books discuss the importance of rural women in agricultural communities. These include but are not limited to Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1912-1963* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jenny Barker-Devine *On Behalf of the Family Farm*.

important apparatuses to “modernize” the countryside, including rural gender and sexual politics.\textsuperscript{113} Even governmental entities created to “help” rural peoples were much more interested in realigning gendered expectations and duties to reflect a society based on an industrial economy. The Extension Service, officially formalized with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, advocated that farm families adopt the middle class, consumerist lifestyle. This change, viewed as relieving farm women from their excess burden of labor (and therefore making it more likely they would stay on the farm), actually removed much of their interpersonal community power.\textsuperscript{114}

Agribusiness, too, attempted to reshape rural gender conceptions after the Second World War. Like other institutions before them, they wanted to create a more standardized vision of rural America, more in line with the postwar emphasis on traditional domestic roles. In this understanding, women would be relegated to the household. Agribusinesses sought to deemphasize women’s previous fluidity in farm duties, especially when it came to production of agricultural commodities. Men too would see basic conceptions of rural masculinity manipulated by these private companies. Responsibilities that had once been the province of their mothers and grandmothers were now presented as both a masculine and capitalistic endeavor. Agribusinesses played on fears of masculine failure, especially the possibility of losing the farm, to attract men to these new industries. All of these inducements were, in part, to retrain the farm family toward a middle class, consumption-based ideology, one that benefitted agricultural industries. Yet, these companies also advocated for gender change in order to realign the overall identity of what it meant to be a farmer.


\textsuperscript{114} Neth, \textit{Preserving the Family Farm}, 189-191.
It is important to know that there was a key difference between the way farm women viewed their work and these manipulations promoted by businesses. Most farm women, despite their obvious agricultural labor, did not consider themselves to be farmers. Instead, these women considered themselves to be “helpers.” Agribusiness used the same word, but for a different purpose. Farm women saw their role as helper as an essential part of the agricultural lifestyle, with the realm of their labor expanding or shrinking to fill whatever the farm demanded. Being a helper could mean driving a tractor, negotiating on behalf of the farm, or keeping the family’s accounts balanced. Fluidity of role defined their existence. The ability to adapt to whatever situation, whether it was doing laundry, slaughtering a pig, milking a cow, or walking a field, was an essential and very real part of farming.115 Conversely, agribusinesses viewed the role of the farm wife helper in much simpler terms. Their realm was the household and their duties centered wholly on the domestic sphere. Defined almost purely in opposition to male work, agribusinesses conceived of female labor as largely secondary and unimportant. These entities ignored the fluidity of female roles because it contradicted their larger goals.

One of the more overt attempts to manipulate gender roles came with the postwar development of the chicken industry. The egg and chicken markets had long been the province of rural women. Just one of many of the diverse tasks these women took on, egg and chicken money play a key role in helping the farm stay afloat during tough times. By diversifying their income, chickens historically helped farm women put food on the table, engage in community trade, and even stave off a foreclosure.116 It was also an important part of local exchange, balancing networks of labor between different farmsteads. While historian Mary Neth

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acknowledged that rural men controlled cash and land, women achieved economic power through informal exchange networks. She wrote, “Women’s exchanges were as crucial to the system of small family farms as was specialized commodity production.” Chickens, like dairy products and garden vegetables, helped create a “social security” for area farms. Diversification was a cushion against market downturns. And even as other farm commodities left the traditional female labor sphere (like dairy), chickens remained one of the central points of female farm labor long into the twentieth century.

This was partly because of the nature of American eating habits and meat production. Whereas the pork and beef market industrialized in the Gilded Age, chickens resisted such efforts. To some extent, this was due to egg production. Many farmers who attempted to industrialize chickens focused on egg laying rather than meat-type production. As such, chicken as a meat source remained mostly limited to “spring” cockerels (young males slaughtered in their first year) and old hens that had outlived their egg laying capabilities. Chickens, therefore, were a luxury item rather than a food staple. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that chickens moved away from female hands. Like other commodities, once it became clear there was money to be made, rural men began to take over the field. In the end, the Second World War was the catalyst for the larger changes to the chicken industry. More and more Americans developed a taste for the white meat. Moreover, for the first time, technological advancements in breeding and processing caught up with the demand. Aware of the new market, firms quickly moved to vertically integrate the industry.

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But just because there was money to be made did not mean that rural gender expectations immediately realigned themselves to fit these new developments. Out of all of the farm commodities, the chicken industry was most boisterous in its own defense of the trade’s masculinity. After all, how do you get men to buy into an occupation that was once the realm of their mothers and sisters? How do you make the chicken coop as respectable as the field or barn? The key was to separate current masculine chicken labor from the feminine handling of chickens in the past.

Such tactics naturally fit into agribusinesses’ temporal recreation of the past, present, and future. In the past, women handled chickens. This was because the business was small, inferior, and largely inefficient. But now, with the natural advancement of time (in terms of technological-determinism), the industry had taken steps to progress. It was men, with their natural inclination towards science and business, who moved the industry from the neighbor’s backyard to a million dollar industry. Even the broiler industry’s own lore both established a female presence, yet quickly diminished it to a mere placeholder, a token of the past. According to industry sponsors in Delmarva (one of America’s poultry capitals), the first person to enter into modern chicken farming was a Mrs. Wilmer Steele of Ocean View, Delaware. Steele, never actually referred to by her given name of Claire, accidently ordered five hundred young broilers in 1923, unintentionally starting the region’s broiler industry.

Steele’s story was well trod ground for Delmarva’s poultry companies and their allies. It played a critical role in helping to juxtapose the past’s “feminine” chicken labor from the modern masculine occupation they claimed by the forties and fifties. Industrial histories, from company speeches to festivals pamphlets, all emphasized that Steele’s story was simply a lucky trick of
historically, a completely *unintentional* action.\(^{120}\) This contrasted neatly with the cultivated image of the current industry. Companies and trade groups, controlled by men, claimed a purposeful movement towards improvement, a deliberate and scientific quest for a better bird. Referencing the famous “Chicken Of Tomorrow” contest of 1948, Paul Philips admired how far Delmarva’s chicken production had come, “We now have the rapid maturing, highly efficient, well-meat, and white-feathered crosses that far out-perform even the greatest expectations of a few years ago.”\(^{121}\) And the march toward progress was fundamentally a masculine endeavor, often driven by competition between men. Edmund H. Fallon, general manager of the Grange League Federation, presented such an argument during the 56\(^{th}\) annual convention of American Feed Manufacturers in 1964. He claimed that real competition did not take place between companies or products, but rather, “between men who direct, manage, and operate the businesses.”\(^{122}\) The only successful companies then were those that employed men who frequently sought improvement. Those, both businesses and men, who were not willing to continually grow were doomed to fail.\(^{123}\) Fallon very well may have been foreshadowing his own company’s future, as little more than a month later the GLF merged with two others, eventually emerging as the farm retailer Agway.\(^{124}\)

Another key to affirming the masculinity of “chicken men” was to emphasize the role of science and technology within the industry, from the broiler house to the butcher’s block. Agribusinesses across the board often invoked conceptions of scientific development to sell their


\(^{123}\) Ibid.

ideology. But for those involved in the poultry business, science became a tool to again denigrate out past female labor while also adding to a sense of masculine professionalization and expertise. The recurring Delmarva Chicken Festival held several gender-specific events. The fair relegated women to the Miss Delmarva Queen contest or cooking contest, while male scientists, dealers, and businessmen dealt with promotion and research development.125 Perdue Chicken was especially quick to point out its scientific prowess to farmers and consumers alike. In its advertisements to New York City housewives, Perdue claimed its pampered chicks were “scientifically grown” for the best quality.126 Another company letter to meat markets claimed that Perdue had the “most extensive research program constantly improving our quality.”127

When aimed at farms, the scientific nature of the Perdue’s advertisements changed to focus more on farm profit and autonomy, ultimately accentuating the desire to keep the farmer (always male) on his land. Out of all of the hallmarks of rural manhood, perhaps no aspect held greater sway than that of land ownership. One Ford Motor short titled “the American Farmer” symbolized this viewpoint. Featuring a real life family (the Blazeys of upstate New York), the industrial film showed the deep connection between family, identity, and place: “The way Mr. Brazey feels about his farm goes deeper than profit or loss. The farm was as much a part of him as his head or his heart. You couldn’t take it away without killing him.”128 The land was an essential part of a farmer’s self-worth and heritage. Possession therefore signaled virtue, independence, and control over dependents, all keys to an age-old Jeffersonian ideology celebrated as uniquely rural.

125 Dover Delmarva Festival Pamphlet, 1950, Box 1, File 3, Delmarva Poultry Industry Records.
127 Letter from Frank Perdue to New York City retailers, January 8, 1971, Box 29, File 293, Perdue Chicken Records.
Perdue exploited these ideals to sell their contract farming as a masculine, ultimately self-sufficient profession. One radio commercial asked interested farmers, “if the idea of being able to spend more time at home and being your own boss sounds interesting.” In a TV commercial, Frank Perdue insisted that with a few acres and a few hours, men could easily own their own broiler house. All of Perdue’s advertisements underscored the masculine traits of contract farming, a production system that seemed to subvert its gendered expectations. Other companies also stressed the ability of rural men to provide for their families through chicken farming. When seed houses like Pioneer and DeKalb entered the chicken market, they specifically highlighted how farmers could continue to earn a good living and brighten their farm’s future all at the same time. Pioneer’s Hy-Liner “Expand” pamphlet perhaps put it the most bluntly of all, outright stating their unit was not “a pin money operation,” a jab often used to devalue female work. This, of course, was a deliberate declaration of masculine prowess, a fundamental disconnection between women’s and men’s labor. Male labor was about providing on a large scale for his family. Conversely, it argued that women had used chickens to supplement inessential consumption. It was this deliberate separation of the past and present, profit margins, and gendered labor that proved to be a critical theme for agribusiness involved in poultry.

These tactics of separation were not just about changing the dynamics of chicken farming’s gendered expectations, but also emphasizing how farmers could continue to be men in an increasingly hostile and depressed farm market. The price squeeze of the postwar period put a

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new strain on this Jeffersonian ideal in rural America. Some men, pushed out of farming, entered into new professions like trucking. Some looked to diversify their income by becoming seed dealers or entering contracted chicken farming. Others invested heavily in new equipment. When International Harvester advertised their new corn planter model, they emphasized how the McCormick 444, “makes you the boss at planting time.” Human conquest and subjugation of nature was a prominent theme in general in agricultural marketing, but this aimed specifically at fantasies of masculine power. By buying the planter, men could “become the boss,” a superior being capable of controlling his environment. And while businesses involved in poultry and other industries underscored the difference between past female labor and current masculine work, they also focused on the disparity between successful men and failed men (or men that kept the farm or lost it). Men who lost their farm therefore also lost the most important hallmarks of their masculinity.

Companies emphasized that success only came from men with determination, efficiency, and a will to adapt to a changing economy. Pioneer argued that while their poultry production units would not save a marginal farm, they could “offer a good farmer an opportunity to keep pace with the rest of the economy.” Frank Perdue maintained that many poultry producers’ refusal to take risks or overall poor management led them to failure. Men who lost their farm consequently did so because they lacked these inherent masculine traits. It was a view shared not just between agribusinesses but academics and trade groups as well. John A. Hopkins, a professor of Agricultural Economics and author whose work Frank Perdue used as research for

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his speeches, argued that modern farmers must now operate in the larger capital economy and that poor management would be punished severely. The president of the Delmarva Poultry Industry, A.E. Bailey, remarked that broilers are, “a fast moving business and demands changes and anyone who refuses to change with it will be out of business or broke.”

Of course, the fundamental point of this stance was that by joining Perdue’s contract team, buying Hy-Line equipment, or adopting other forms of modernization, a stressed farm and its steward could join the fast track to success. Pioneer noted that their chicken units did not require extra land or labor to increase profits. Frank Perdue claimed that his company’s experience and oversight made it easier for his farmers to succeed. In fact, it was Perdue’s own contract hatching program that enabled, “more of our good farmers to remain on the farm.”

The connection between success, consumption, and masculinity was a key element in the ultimate goal of agribusinesses: to make themselves absolutely indispensable to postwar agriculture. By introducing new standards of masculinity, poultry agribusinesses redesigned a cultural landscape to better fit their own desires. Such corporations then held the key to retaining masculinity itself, through consumption of their necessary products and expertise.

But the chicken industry was not alone in its desire to change both rural masculinities and femininities. Other agribusinesses also pushed for a transformation in female roles, specifically the movement of women away from labor fluidity and towards middle class expectations of homemakers. Some of this was less a matter of overt desire to modify than a consequence of the introduction of new cultural practices. In an internal report on the possible markets for different machinery, International Harvester concluded that their mechanized sugar beet harvester could change labor roles on the family farm. The harvester would remove farm wives and children.

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136 Ibid.
from the “dirty and distasteful” secondary labor of the beet production. Another advertisement boasted that McCormick forage feeders could make cattle feeding a “one-man operation.” The implication was that not only would these machines speed efficiency, but that would effectively replace farm laborers, many of whom were women and children.

Other businesses were much more overt about their desire to take women out of the field (and the community) and into the home. Garst and Thomas Corn Company, a subdivision of Pioneer Hybrid, made it clear that women had little role in the business of selling hybrids. In a 1963 sales letter to their dealers, Garst asserted that their next open house was a serious business meeting and therefore dealers should not bring their wives. The request may seem odd, after all, industrial capitalism had long separated the worlds of male and female labor. But in rural communities, women actually played a very important role in local commerce. Their connections to others, familial and otherwise, allowed small farms and their communities to survive. The company was well aware of this influence. Not only did Pioneer sometimes contract female dealers, but women were often the first people to take over a contract when a male dealer was injured, indisposed, or died. When the company’s district sales manager for Northern Indiana, Lloyd Storms, passed away unexpectedly in 1960, his wife assumed responsibility for sales for the rest of the season. At a summer sales meetings (a part company party, part information seminar), Pioneer noted, “Every salesman and his wife should have been present to gain the knowledge about Pioneer varieties and other first hand information about selling.”

139 International Harvester, “McCormick No. 61 Power Forage Feeder,” Box 524, File 4356, International Harvester Central File.
140 Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, September 9, 1963, Box 9, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
141 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm, 41-90.
143 Letter to Salesmen, August 18, 1964, Box 9, File 52, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
But the company was always careful to erect a wall between serious male “business” and female “helping.” Rural women, no matter how gifted or influential, were always portrayed as secondary to their male relations. This notion was enforced in various forms of Pioneer literature, including company’s monthly journal *Pioneer Kernels* (a one-stop-shop for company news, agricultural advice, and salesmen’s gossip). The June 1954 issue featured the story of a “typical” successful salesman in Wiley Kirk, an older gentleman whose involvement in farm improvement associations helped him succeed in seed selling. Pictured along with a Kirk was his devoted wife, an unnamed figure who “assisted” her husband in his sales. The images of nameless, seemingly interchangeable, women often appeared in relation to their named male relatives. Even young boys received the recognition of identification, whereas their mothers did not. When Monsanto profiled five “progressive” farmers, they highlighted family ties (marriage, children, and pertinent sibling relations) but only named the adult male relatives who co-farmed. In fact, the lone instance of female identification came in a picture caption. Facing away from the camera (while her husband stood forward), Monsanto attached Della Hohenstein to her husband Elmer, the primary subject of both the picture and article. Like in everything else, women were the secondary consideration, their identification only counting when connected to a male relative. It was an important gendered distinction. Men, even at a very young age, assumed the primary status as actors. *Males* engaged in serious commerce. On the other hand, *female* labor was a contribution to the male action. Men worked; women aided.

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145 Ibid, 7-8.
146 Monsanto, “Are These the “New” Farmers?: Sketches of five outstanding corn growers help answer the question,” *Monsanto Magazine* 48, no. 2 (March 1968): 18-22, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
If the seed corn trade held any ambiguities about the gendered nature of its labor, mechanization, another continuing development of postwar agriculture, did not. Mechanization, in both trade and actual use, was assumed to be at the center of male identity. Companies like International Harvester, John Deere, Ford, Allis-Chambers, and others had long associated machine use with male labor, standardization, efficiency, and success. In reality, however, machine operation on the farmstead was not nearly so clear-cut. Historians like Katherine Jellison, Robert Kline, and Trevor Pinch have all showcased the fluid nature of technology in the rural context. Jellison specifically emphasized how farm women utilized technology (assumed to be the realm of masculine expertise) to retain their role as producers well into the 1960s. But this did not stop companies from emphasizing the masculinity of machine labor. As with the separation between male and female poultry labor, companies attempted to showcase the distinction between men and women using tractors. Advertisements almost always showcased male users, indicating that machine use was the realm of men. Even when advertisements featured women, the corporation utilized their presence to highlight the assumed difference between male and female roles. In one particularly blatant example, International Harvester managed to separate the labor of men and women riding the same tractor in the same advertisement! On one hand, a company booklet argued that their tractors allowed part-time male farmers a chance to continue to provide for their families. This advertisement showcased a smiling farmer with his nameless wife and children, implying that the Farmall Cub allowed the family to enjoy the profits of father’s labors. Conversely, just a few pages later, the booklet featured the tractor’s use by a professional female nurse and part-time farmer. Instead of

indicating the profit or enjoyment she gained by owning this piece of equipment, the company used her presence to showcase how easy the Farmall Cub was to use. The implication was that the tractor was so uncomplicated, even a woman could operate it successfully. Once again, companies denigrated female labor, even when it was the same, as secondary to that of men.

The notion of female “helping” was at the heart of agribusinesses’ realignment of gender assumptions. Looking to standardize labor expectations and norms in an industrial system, these companies needed rural gender to shed its fluidity and realign with norms of an urban white middle class. Simply put, they need farmwomen to act like housewives and only housewives, relegating them to the household. Company advertisements, salesmen letters, pamphlets, and other publications pushed rural women to act more and more like their urban counterparts. Middle class values of consumption and separate spheres became normalized in literature even as rural women continued to work outside the home both in the field and in off-farm jobs. Agribusinesses wanted rural families to assume the same roles and expectations built on rigid conceptual notions of gendered labor. Men worked outside the home. Women existed in the domestic realm. This fit into widely held notions of “normal” behavior in the postwar period. But why would a company that sold hybrids or tractors care about idealizing the farm family unit?

This restructuring echoed one of the most important goals of corporate agriculture, to shift dependence from local exchanges networks (neighbors, community, and of course, wives and children) to corporate institutions: their products, their employees, and their expertise. By imposing a simplified expectation of middle class, gendered spheres, companies deprived exchange communities of their most necessary component, women. Key links that not only connected farm communities’ together, farm women also provided much of the basic labor,

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149 International Harvester, “Farming with the Farmall Cub,” circa early 1940s, 8-19, Box 520, File 2375, International Harvester Central File.
knowledge, and provisions to keep a farm functional. But gendered spheres culled these important roles, eliminating women from local positions that empowered them and ultimately led to a breakdown in community exchanges.

Removing capable women from local networks, or simply getting men to ignore feminine roles, allowed companies to fill the void. Displacement created new opportunities for private business to “solve” the problems of agriculture: labor shortages, rising operating costs, increased need for production, and the expectation of middle-class consumption. Farm families that bought into these values would ultimately be more pliant to other company suggestions, more willing to act with instead of against the company, and ultimately identify with corporate values and expectations. Acceptance of industrial capitalism was the most important issue of this gendered realignment. Rural fluidity in gender was just a casualty.

While real life consequences varied, these changes fit neatly in the final piece of agribusinesses’ temporal realignment; a golden vision of the future. By playing on the conception of “natural” progress, agribusinesses promoted an idealized view of America’s agricultural future. Within this venerated image, many of the problems of the past and present would be solved. Breakthroughs by large corporate entities would enable the elimination of issues large and small, from famines to soil fertility to proper family behavior. If farm families accepted these changes, they too would share in their benefits. In the promotion of its new hydrostatic drive, International Harvester claimed that agricultural technology companies had produced a new era of agriculture. The company waxed poetically that, “Agricultural technology has eliminated this age-old problem. Today, American agriculture and light industrial user have the answer with Hydrostatic All Speed Drive.”150 Their new product was the “future” of the

farm. The Manufacturing Chemist Association insisted that farmers could soon look ahead to a time when cheap chemicals would defend their crops and make their lives easier. Rath Packing commented that their pioneering standard of meat processing allowed families throughout the nation to enjoy healthy canned food. A happy future was the key component of this business tactic, the lynchpin in the technological determinism of corporate time. It was the ultimate carrot on a stick, a vague yet enticing goal that agricultural companies could wave in the faces of reluctant farmer. No wonder Frank Perdue wanted company artwork to feature “progress in action: past, present, and [my emphasis] future.”

Of course, in order for people to reach the promise of this future, farmers needed to consume these corporate breakthroughs, thereby completing the process of progress. It was an objective that many had tried before. The pre-war period witnessed an amalgamation of different individuals and groups attempting to fundamentally change rural communities and agricultural methods. Sometimes they had been successful. Other times, these reformers had failed. For agribusinesses after the Second World War, bringing this future to bear hinged on farmers adopting the necessary materials and techniques. In order to achieve this, companies needed to change the way farmers fundamentally thought about themselves. To fully embrace the industrial, capitalistic system, farmers needed to be molded to fit the systems. Farmers would become businessmen. Women developed into middle class housewives. Producers shaped into consumers. Communal labor networks transformed into a competitive marketplace. And for agribusinesses, this change was an argument of when, not if.

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CHAPTER THREE: FROM PRODUCER TO CONSUMER: CONSUMERISM IN THE RURAL CONTEXT

Somewhere in the American heartland, sometime in the 1950s, a farmer received a soil district “farmer of the year” award. The winner, Tom Gordon, thanked many people in his acceptance speech, but ultimately gave his teenage son Ralph true credit for the award. According to Tom, it was his son’s persistent belief in soil conservation and willingness to try new practices that pushed the farm into a record year. By using soil surveys and crop rotation plans, created by a local soil conservative specialist, the farm had reached a new level of efficiency and profit. Touched by his father’s statement, young Ralph promised the crowd, “We were a little slow getting started, but we’ve seen what can be done in one year’s time. You can be sure we’ll stay with it and do everything recommended.”

This farm family’s heartwarming tale of successful modernization was depicted in a series of films by John Deere. Invented by the implement dealer’s marketing department, this fictional farm family and their story represented the characteristics desired by the implement dealer. The Gordons showed what could happen when farmers placed their trust in agricultural experts and adopted approved practices. Their faith was rewarded with not just awards and praise, but also real profit. Perhaps even more importantly, along with expert advice, the Gordons’ success was made possible by John Deere implements. Tractors, disk tillers, plows, seeders, and other products made it possible for the family to improve their land. Even if it did take a little prodding from his unnamed wife (“you’ve just found excuses time after time, and the

silliest one I’ve heard is the one that your father and your grandfather made a living off this farm
and you’re not going to change things”), Tom Gordon found success in adaptation.

Yet, more than just showing the benefits of accepting expertise, this promotional film
illustrated a middle class idealism in postwar farm life. The Gordons were a perfect aspirational
family for rural Americans. Tom was a graduate of the state’s college and a well-respected (and
well-moneyed) individual. His son Ralph was a member of the local FFA and soil conservation
society, interested in new techniques and technologies. Mrs. Gordon, no first name given, was a
homemaker who worked inside the household. The family had a nice house, car, telephone,
electricity, and all the material trappings of comfortable living. They seemed to consume as
much as they produced and had ample time to enjoy an evening’s leisure. Despite living in the
countryside, the Gordons were the quintessential postwar family, with all the same values and
characteristics as their urban cousins.

As American society became more time-oriented in the twentieth century, products that
claimed to save time and labor became more attractive to the potential customer. This desire was
intimately connected with the growth of the middle class as a dominant form of cultural and
ideological identification. Though its roots are vague and singular characteristics difficult to
address, the emergence of the middle class as the dominant faction of America’s social order had
a profound effect on cultural values and conceptions of normality. New social patterns and a
changing American landscape also reflected the purposeful celebration of middle class values, as
historian Elaine Tyler May wrote that, “American leaders promoted the American way of life as
the triumph of capitalism, allegedly available to all who believed in its values. This way life was
characterized by affluence, located in suburbia, and epitomized by white middle class nuclear families.”155

Compounding the problem of definition was the issue of perception versus material reality in an entity that was constantly evolving. In this sense, the gradual rise of the middle class as America’s hegemonic cultural group was much more about ideological consensus than “real” quantifiable data.156 In fact, studies showed that many people identified as middle class even as their income, profession, family size, capital-investment, and other elemental life structures failed to adhere to its inescapable qualities. Even these definite qualities tend to be more guidelines than hard and fast rules. With an acknowledgement of its complex nature and the various theories involved, I am defining the middle class by its ideological hallmarks rather than material reality. Therefore, the elements of the middle class concentrate on expectations of material consumerism, strict divide between work and leisure time, public and private sphere, access to educational opportunities, greater economic security, and home ownership. Peter Stearns attempted to offer a more precise way of defining this problematic term by asking scholars to blend social science and history. But even he was quick to point out the need to view the middle class as a heuristic device that defied simple formulas or patterns. For as Stearns exasperatingly noted, “We’re dealing with a peculiar beast and quite possibly with several beasts.” Or, in short, it’s complicated.157

Perhaps the key to understanding the American middle class and its effect on American society in the postwar period is not to focus on quantifiable labels but rather cultural identifiers

made possible by a corporate-led consumer economy. In terms of consumption after World War Two, the American middle class contained several important characteristics that set it apart from the working class. This consisted of the access to hard cash as an exchange component, disposable income, an emphasis on individual choice as an important purchasing factor, and a focus on leisure. As Lizabeth Cohen’s article “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots” showed, working class urbanites in the 1920s and even the 30s often negotiated between standardized mass culture and local community traditions, leading to distinct patterns of consumption.\(^{158}\) While most working class families lacked the economic capacity to buy with cash or venture to new chain stores far away from their city neighborhoods, corporate retailers increasingly endorsed middle class Americans as their ideal target audience. Spurred on by the possibility of homogenization in mass culture, corporate leaders believed that training consumption patterns was the key to unlocking success in the marketplace.\(^{159}\) This intensified in the postwar period, as both fears of creeping communism and an alliance between business and the federal government encouraged all Americans to view prosperity through the lens of consumption. Though reality made it difficult for many to participate in this consumers’ republic, businesses continued to uphold middle class ideals as a blueprint for success.\(^{160}\) As such, middle class identity was not so much a material reality for Americas, but an ideology of culture and consumption, literally bought and sold.

It was an identity that agribusinesses believed was the key to their larger economic goals. Agribusinesses desired greater sales numbers, but most notably, wanted to continue their

infiltration of the agricultural industry. One of the methods to achieving this goal was to reconfigure the way farmers viewed themselves. The expectation was that if rural families saw themselves as part of the middle class (with its values of consumerism, leisure, and defined gender and racial normativity) farmers would become a more pliant and dependent customer base.

Many of the expectations of the urban-facing middle class were attractive to all corporations, but especially to agribusinesses. All of these traits could be exploited to increase dependence on agribusiness products and expertise. Consumerism was obviously beneficial to companies, as agribusinesses wanted farmers to see themselves as consumers. In fact, this value system was predicated on the notion that in order to produce, one first needed to consume. This extended beyond the barnyard to encompass the household and family’s overall lifestyle. The middle class emphasis on more material goods and an expectation of leisure time required more profit and time-saving labor from the farmstead, a possibility promised by the consumption of agricultural products. At the same time, farmers that took up an urban middle class identity also faced new restrictions on the labor of family members, namely women and children. Therefore, labor and time-saving agricultural products were not simply a luxury for middle class farm families, but a complete necessity into order to function. Ultimately, agribusinesses used identity to shape consumer impulses and lay a fertile ground for the consumption of their products and wider acceptance of their institutional beliefs.

**Consumerism and Community in the Historic Countryside**

The history of farmers, capitalism, and consumerism is a complex mixture of economic pressure and social traditions battling it out on a local level. The rural political economy has been changing since markets began connecting people beyond the small confines of their
communities. Historians may have argued about it for nearly as long. But with the dust settling in the 2000s, it became clear to most historians that the tried and true, “it’s complicated,” was the best answer for an unclear and intricate question. Farmers were consumers, of course, but also producers. Agrarian people employed new technology, but tended to do so on their own terms. They acted and reacted to consumerism and new material in many different ways throughout American history.161

There are significant distinctions in this relationship when discussing rural people. While scholars tend to disagree on when rural people began to enter into a new relationship with capital (with a predisposition to declare their area of study the definitive moment of transformation), most emphasize the place of community within these choices. Farming communities survived on communal exchanges of labor and goods, even as centralizing market forces and new scientific developments changed the agricultural process. Hence materialism in the rural context often vacillated between individual and community needs depending on the situation, with farmers participating in the wider mass market but also maintaining reciprocal local connections well into the twentieth century. In fact, many agricultural organizations formed in part to protect farmers’ consumer interests, seeking a stronger joint voice among the market players.162

161 Consumerism was one of the most fundamental changes to American agriculture after the Civil War. Though many historians have noted the consumerist tendencies long before the war, including Christopher Clark and Martin Bruegel among others, this greater accelerated after the war. Railroads, growing big business, and laissez-faire governmental policy made consumerism more readily available to American farmers. However, many historians argued that instead of being passive consumers of goods, service, and new technology, rural people actively controlled their consumption. For more information, see Hal Barron, Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930 (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); David Blanke, Sowing American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000); Robert Kline, Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

162 This includes groups such as the Grange and the Farm Bureau. See Blanke, Sowing the American Dream, 100-225; Nancy Berlage, Farmers Helping Farmers, 1-150.
Perhaps the most important factor in farm based consumption was the survival strategy of making do and “doing without.” Described by Mary Neth in her ground breaking *Preserving the Family Farm*, this approach accentuated diverse, communal labor as a source of economic strength. Making do saved money through joint labor of the family and local community. Other times, farm families simply did without, ignoring perceived modern necessities (like indoor plumbing, electricity, or material goods) in favor of saving capital or investing in less glamorous necessities.\(^\text{163}\) Even when farmers did purchase consumer goods, many did not give up the diversity of labor that saved them money in the long run. For farm women especially, their work displayed a surprising capacity for adaptation. With much of the farmstead’s consumerism directed towards the barn and the field, women often had to diversify their production to create other sources of income.\(^\text{164}\) Women produced and traded their butter and eggs, made their own clothing and household supplies, farmed and canned their own fruits and vegetables, and engaged in other revenue-creating work. When the environment failed to produce a sizable yield or commercial pressures made for hard times, the diversity of labor and the willingness to forgo modern conveniences allowed many farm families to stay on their land.\(^\text{165}\)

Rural unwillingness to jump headlong into the consumer economy was a source of frustration for reformers, government workers, and academics alike. Progressive Era reformers believed that a lack of modern conveniences was one of the main drivers of rural depopulation. Faced with a dull countryside, young people fled for greater pleasure in the city. Ironically, rural women’s labor became a basis of intense scrutiny, with government officials and others claiming that farm women were overworked drudges who desperately needed modern technology to ease

\(^{163}\) Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 9-10 and 203-204.


\(^{165}\) Also see Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us To Work*, 1-107.
their burden.\textsuperscript{166} One solution, they argued, was to give farm women a chance to enjoy the same labor-saving devices their sisters in the city already had. This proposed mass consumerism would both keep more rural people from leaving the farm while also improving the efficiency and health of country living. It was crusade that faced a blend of acceptance and reluctance long into the mid-century.\textsuperscript{167} Even after the Second World War, the USDA and professional organizations attempted to increase consumerism in the farm household. Industry films created by the Extension Service and the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics showed the innate benefits that awaited a rural wife who updated her kitchen. One 1949 film, titled “A Step-Saving Kitchen,” promised that a modern, efficient kitchen would make the farmwife’s task of food preparation, “so much lighter, the housewife can share her family's enjoyment at mealtime.”\textsuperscript{168}

Even when farmers did enter into the world of mass consumerism, their actual use of the products differed in many ways from what manufacturers envisioned. Instead of being passive consumers, farm people interacted with commodities in unique ways. As Ronald Kline indicated, rural people socially constructed new uses for technologies like the car, the radio, telephones, and electricity. This blurred the line between consumers and producers, as rural people adapted these products for other uses. Farmers utilized power generated by cars to run everything from washing machines to dairy pumps. Telephone party lines allowed rural people to signal for help,

\textsuperscript{166} This is not to say that reformer observations did not hold a measure of truth. As Joan Jensen pointed out in her article “I’d rather be dancing,” the labor burden placed on women often drove them to migrate away from rural areas. Joan M Jensen, ”I’d Rather Be Dancing”: Wisconsin Women Moving On.” Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 22, no. 1 (2001): 1-20.


play live music, or communicate in different ways.\textsuperscript{169} Women also adjusted to new technology for their own uses. Defying the expectations of outside reformers, farm women embraced technology as a way to maintain their intrinsic value to the farmstead. Though men eventually took over female-run, money-making poultry, dairy, and garden operations (specifically in the postwar period), rural women exploited technology to create the time to enter into new production activities. Some women also ran tractors and other farm equipment in the fields. Others used cars to leave the farm and find paying jobs.\textsuperscript{170} By becoming agents of change, rural people recrafted consumerism in the countryside to meet their own needs.

\textbf{Agribusiness and Consumerism}

Agricultural companies certainly had a stake in rural consumption patterns. Early railroads and consolidated livestock groups supported the development of agricultural professional organizations because it furthered their own interests. When these public institutions sought to “educate” farmers, they mostly promoted the consumption of new products and the adaptation of commercial based agriculture. Yet, along with their allies, agribusinesses constantly struggled against ingrained rural customs. Many times, especially before the Second World War, farmers simply lacked the capital to invest in these commercial products even if they wanted to. Later on, farmers continued in the tradition of taking on new technologies and adapting them for their own purposes. Much to the dismay of agricultural experts and businessmen, farmers made their own decisions about their economic enterprises, including the purchase and use of goods and services.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{169} Ronald Kline, \textit{Consumers in the Country}, 1-131.
\textsuperscript{170} Katherine Jellison, \textit{Entitled to Power}, 107-181.
\textsuperscript{171} Anderson, \textit{Industrializing the Corn Belt}, 5-12.
Therefore, one of the first tenets of identity that agribusinesses wished for farmers to embrace was a greater focus on consumerism, specifically products that promoted agriculture on an industrial scale. Firstly and perhaps most importantly, agribusinesses wanted farmers to see themselves as consumers. Obviously, consumerism had not been the first emphasis for most farm families pre-1945, despite external and internal attempts to change. Because of diversification and the large informal local economy, many farms were fairly self-sufficient. What was more, agricultural communities often provided the necessary labor and other requirements for rural life. Even if they wanted to buy consumer goods, most farmers lacked the cash reserve to completely invest in the material changes advocated by reformers.\footnote{Ibid, 5-12.} Despite intervention and educational outreach done by outside institutions, many farmers failed to update their households with modern conveniences or adopt “labor-saving, profit-enriching” products in their farming operations.

For agribusiness, this focus on production, not consumption, was a big problem. The whole commercial enterprise was built on consumerism, the understanding that farmers would buy these products. Moreover, agribusinesses believed that as farmers consumed more products, they would also tacitly buy into the agricultural techniques and methods advocated by these companies.\footnote{Fitzgerald, 	extit{Every Farm a Factory}, 5.} Given enough exposure, farmers would eventually adopt an industrial, capital-intensive conception of agriculture, wholly dependent on agribusiness. Therefore, farm families’ historic emphasis on economizing or “doing without” was a serious problem. Economizing undermined the very foundation of consumer-based agriculture and allowed farmers to continue their operations without the need for larger institutions. Agribusinesses bet their economic future on becoming essential to the agricultural process. If farm families failed to see consumption as
completely necessary, businesses would lack the power to enact other changes they so desperately wanted.

One way agribusinesses emphasized the benefits of a middle class lifestyle was the importance placed on consumer goods. Unlike chemical fertilizer or confinement barns, these material goods highlighted enjoyment and entertainment. Though they had little to nothing to do with economic survival of the farm, they were an equally important point for companies desiring greater consumerism. After all, “doing without” implied a level of consumer frugality. This contradicted the implicit benefits of materialism. Goods were supposed to make life more comfortable for their owners: washers to speed up laundry; television to entertain, new clothing to look one’s best, and new cars to show off family wealth. If farmers accepted their new status as middle class businessmen and market competitors, companies suggested that they would gain all the unspoken benefits of middle class America, including the consumption of material goods. Overall, this emphasis was important for selling the middle-class lifestyle to farmers as a desirable existence they not only could, but should, attain for their families.

Many agribusinesses, even though they did not directly profit from these goods, still underscored the benefits of material consumerism in the household. One of the tactics these businesses used was to reward and entice farmers with merchandise. For Pioneer and Rath Packing, this meant dangling material goods in front of their contracted dealers as prizes for high sale numbers. Wristwatches, dinnerware, tool sets, radios, furniture, jewelry, and many other products were available to dealers who performed well. To fully engage the whole farm in mass consumerism, these companies targeted other members of family. In 1964, Pioneer collaborated with the Farm Journal to send free aprons and cookbooks to a number of southern farm wives,
hoping to entice their husbands to do business with the company. That same year, Rath Packing Company sent a letter addressed not to their underperforming salesmen, but rather their wives. In a bizarre attempt to shame these men to turn in greater sales numbers, Rath told these women, “I regret to inform you the ‘Corning Ware’ Christmas presents for you (to be earned by your husband) cannot be placed under your tree. I still trust you will ‘handle your husband with care.’” They then noted that their salesmen-husbands still had time to earn a reward for Christmas. It was a method that trusted in the incentive of consumerism, the belief that rural families would be motivated by material gain.

In many ways, these companies were facing a more receptive farming audience. Unlike most of their parents and grandparents, more and more farmers embraced the consumerism of postwar living. Whether it was because they finally possessed the finances to do so or to survive in the competitive marketplace, younger farmers tended to spend more on consumer goods and other middle class expenditures than their older colleagues. As professor of agricultural economics John A. Hopkin noted, "During the first half of this century, about 85 percent of farmers’ capital investments were supplied from savings out of farm income. Now, however, the needs are too great relative to the profit margins. Farm families are no longer content to divert so much of their income away from family health, education, dental care, etc. as was the case a generation ago." The mantra of “doing without,” so critical to economic survival in the past, was being replaced by a more consumer-based view of household expenses. Many seemed unwilling to forgo the consumer’s republic enjoyed by their urban peers. Russell Arndt, a farmer

174 Letter to Farm Journal from Pioneer Hybrid, May 21, 1964, Box 9, File 2, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
175 Letter to “salesmen’s wives” from Rath Packing Company, November and December 1964, Series 8, Box 6, File 12, Rath Packing Company Records.
176 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm, 250-255.
178 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm, 9-10 and 203-204.
highlighted by a Monsanto publication, argued that today’s new farmers were no longer willing to accept simple subsistence farming or living. They were instead more modern, almost indistinguishable from their city brethren.\(^{179}\) This included more money spent on consumer goods, leisure activities, and domestic conveniences. It also included larger investments in new farm technology. The “revolution” of agriculture after 1945 had as much to do with a better rural reception as it did actual scientific advancement.

Obviously this consumerism was not solely aimed at products in the barnyard or fields, but also based on profound changes to socio-economic status and lifestyle expectations. One of the most dramatic ideological changes centered on expectations of middle-class status, with all the implied benefits of materialism, leisure, and comfort. Although the phrase “family farm” has a number of different political and cultural meanings, often depending on the context and who has decided to use it, agribusinesses used the term as a symbol of the possible opportunities awaiting the postwar farm.\(^{180}\) The modern family farm, they argued, could and should enjoy all the benefits of their urban and suburban neighbors, including convenience in the home and in the barn. This conveyed a number of different expectations and radically simplified the complex nature of agricultural life. It deliberately moved away from the ideology of “doing without” in favor of mass consumerism. America’s own relationship with consumerism changed immensely during this time, including a move towards consumption for its own sake. An intertwining of

\(^{179}\) Monsanto, “Are These the “New” Farmers?: Sketches of five outstanding corn growers help answer the question,” *Monsanto Magazine* 48, no. 1 (1968): 20, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.

\(^{180}\) Shane Hamilton’s article “Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post–World War II United States” analyzed the connections between postwar politics, ideology, and the rise of agribusiness in the rural context. His article on the nature of the postwar farm policy debate and its influence on American conceptions of agriculture was especially important to understanding the intersection between politics, economics, and culture. It also traced the development of the ideological phases “agribusiness” and “family farm,” showcasing how various groups utilized these terms for their own political goals. Shane Hamilton, “Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post–World War II United States,” *Technology & Culture* 55, No. 13 (2014): 560-590.
politics and business, citizens could believe they were supporting the American economy through mindless buying.\(^{181}\) Agribusinesses imagined that farmers could not only have more, but should have more. All they needed to do was to adopt the traits that would allow them economic access to the middle class.

**Making a New Farmer: Using Race, Class, and Gender to Emphasize Consumption**

Perhaps deliberately, the social realities of who could potentially reap the most economic benefits of the postwar boom, (white, economically mobile, and male Americans) also matched agribusinesses’ own perception of who was a farmer. To say that American cultural interpretations of agriculture have been whitewashed is an understatement. The famous yeoman, a conception with prominent social capital throughout American history, was fundamentally male and fundamentally white. For agricultural companies in the postwar era, the continued emphasis on this singular vision was an easy way to showcase exactly who they believed were “farmers.” Advertisements and other company rhetoric repeatedly presented white men as the sole proprietors of this identity. That in and of itself was not unique or surprising. But what was more distinctive was the combination of white masculinity with other celebrated traits: consumerism, belief in expertise, business-like mindset, and competitive spirit. It was here that many companies attempted to find an ideal spokesperson, one that represented the epitome of modern farming. For some implement companies, their founders (Cyrus McCormick and John Deere) served as strong examples of a competitive businessmen/farmer. This was echoed by chicken producers Perdue and their rival Tyson, as both imbued their founders with modern farming identity. Pioneer used Roswell Garst as an example of a “typical” farmer who made

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good by adopting a consumer-based, business-minded approach to his land.182 Other times, companies eschewed the use of a specific individual. Instead, a faceless, nameless white male farmer served as the main symbol of modern farming identity. Thousands of advertisements illustrated male farmers, often middle-aged, in close proximity to new products, riding on tractors, or performing other agricultural tasks. Sometimes smiling but often stoic, the farmers depicted in these advertisements reflected a melding of old time yeomanry with modern expectations, a proud steward steeped in modern convenience and profit-motivation. When looking at these advertisements, this singular image would suggest that these men alone farmed, and farmed alone.

Obviously, this did not reflect reality. The truth was that, like other aspects of agricultural identity, farmers were a diverse group. Because of the need to constantly adapt to local forces, their identity reflected the unique environment in which they lived in. Region shaped communities. Soil conditions and crop type required unique forms of production. Social forces, from war to migration, changed the makeup of rural populations and their relationship to agriculture. Although economic pressure (among other issues) constricted America’s farming population, they remained a diverse collection of individuals and families. Our current monolithic understanding is, in many ways, a product of agribusiness’s intervention in American cultural perceptions.

People of color have always been involved in agriculture, something that agribusinesses themselves, despite their willful silence, were well aware of. Pioneer received solicitation from Black farming newspapers, journals, and radios to advertise.183 Playing on company loyalty,
Black extension agents in Alabama asked for and received a donation from the seed company.\textsuperscript{184} International Harvester, aware of the tension over civil rights in areas of the south, crafted an “equal opportunity” program that hoped to both defuse tricky situations and attract more Black college-educated workers.\textsuperscript{185} When it came to their internal agricultural operations, Pioneer often utilized people of color. Like many other companies, the company employed Mexican workers to detassel their seed fields.\textsuperscript{186} Even with the tightening of immigrant policy in the 1960s, the seed house continued to engage these workers. But Pioneer was not the only company aware of racial diversities in agriculture. International Harvester and other equipment dealers were particularly sensitive to the trends in the agricultural labor of people of color, predominantly because these laborers competed directly with the implements offered by these companies. The mechanized cotton picker, potato diggers, corn combines, and other grain implements replaced long traditions of hand picking by the local agricultural underclass.\textsuperscript{187}

Though poor farmers of all races played a critical role in the seasonal work of agriculture, Black workers in the south, Mexican laborers in the West (and moving elsewhere), and other racial minorities made up a large proportion of these laborers.\textsuperscript{188} Businesses coveted this work because they believed that their products would replace these efforts, making these people’s labor essentially obsolete. For example, Monsanto celebrated sugar beet farmers, and in turn their own chemical products, for successfully replacing hand labor. The company noted that mechanization had been the long term goal for beet agriculture, shifting away from hand labor as immigration restrictions against Mexican workers constricted the flow of migrant labor.

\textsuperscript{184} Letter to Frank Jackson from Floyd Collins, March 11, 1964, Box 9, File 21, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.  
\textsuperscript{185} Internal Memo to John Vance from John W. Kenney, June 26, 1967, 3, Box 51, File 16083, International Harvester Central File.  
\textsuperscript{188} Hahamovitch, \textit{Fruits of Their Labors}, 3-128.
Monsanto’s chemicals aided this transition, with the company arguing that they were leading the way for an efficient future. They celebrated a possible future in which the, “ideal crop would never fail, has a ready made market, no waste, and no hand labor [author emphasis].” While certainly prejudicial against people of color (after all Pioneer’s migrant workers received 15 cents less than white adult workers and just 5 cents more than white children) these companies were certainly aware of racial variances in agriculture. It was when this awareness was deliberately cast off, in favor of a monolithic interpretation, that the results promoted a vision of agriculture that was profoundly whitewashed.

In order to drive home the point that farmers were singly white, agribusiness used race to reframe the history of American agriculture. As previously discussed, agribusinesses were fond of rewriting the past to suit their needs and promote their companies as problem solving saviors. One aspect that many played on to support this assertion was to describe indigenous peoples as a “primitive other.” This implied that American Indians of the New World lacked the willpower or capacity to fully harness the power that America’s soil offered. Despite living on the land for thousands of years, it was not until Europeans, specifically those special individuals attached to certain companies, arrived that American agriculture could reach its full potential. Pioneer conveyed that Native Americans were the first to “discover” corn, with the insinuation that these people had no understanding of how to “channel” its production. John Deere implied that “primitive man,” an explicit allusion to American Indians, could not reach the rich soil he lived on, the land itself defying his simple tools and simple mind. Rath Packing Company especially

189 Monsanto, “Growing without Pains,” Monsanto Magazine 45, no. 4 (October 1965): 20-22, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
employed this stereotypical assertion in its marketing ploys, engaging in mocking portrayals of Native Americans to sell their products. One Rath wiener campaign urged children to create their own “Indian” jokes.193 Another ad suggested that Rath was the “big chief” of the whole ham tribe.194 The company even created a TV spot featuring four stereotypical “Indians” singing because, according to consumer research, “kids found Indians exciting and fun.”195 In many ways, these attempts played on the prejudicial notion of racial progress, a covert social Darwinism. Only once white Americans possessed the land, and were then aided by large corporations, could agriculture truly become productive and efficient. By clearly outlining and caricaturing the racial other, these companies in turn defined what they believed to be a “real” farmer.

However, race was not the only factor that agribusinesses used to clearly separate who was and who was not a farmer. Gender also was a key aspect that divided and simplified farming identity. Women, historic producers on all levels of the farming operation, were marginalized. As explained in the first chapter, agribusinesses looked to constrict the realm of female labor. Despite their awareness of the diversity of female activity, these companies conveyed ideology similar to white, middle-class, suburban America. Agribusinesses, in the very few times they actually discussed rural women, fully placed them within the realm of home, their activities confined to traditional domestic labor. While in reality strong participants in agricultural labor, rural women faded into the background in the discourse of these companies.

Class, though trickier, was also a source of division in the manipulation of farming identity. Because agribusinesses desired farmers to adopt a more middle-class identity, poorer, subsistence-based farmsteads were obviously not the target audience of their marketing schemes. Smaller farmers were less likely to invest in the more commercial system. But even more than that, agribusinesses quickly defined these small producers as unworthy of the title of farmer itself. Businesses insinuated that these families would be better off leaving farming all together. In turn, the agricultural economy would be healthier without the deadweight of these struggling farms. Though there were early efforts to bring these smaller farmers into the fold (including introducing them to products that would raise their socio-economic status) most agribusinesses (much like the USDA during the New Deal) eventually came to the conclusion that these producers lacked the necessary skills, ideology, education, and willingness to adapt to changing times. Instead, companies emphasized that “modern” farmers were educated business-minded adopters of technology, who operated on a larger, more commercial scale.196

It was an argument that seemed to be confirmed by rural sociologists in the 1950s. Iowa State University’s sociologists George Beal and Joe Bohlen published a small bulletin called “How Farm People Accept New Ideas,” which eventually developed into the well-known diffusion process theory. In it, they argued that farm communities accepted new ideas in certain patterns, with a small minority always innovating first. These innovators and early adopters fit into a certain pattern. Beal and Bohen drew connections between this minority and their participation in youth clubs like 4-H and FFA, and formal membership in agricultural organizations. These men, the sociologists claimed, were highly educated, highly capitalized, and

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more likely to read extension bulletins.\footnote{George Beal and Joe Bohlen, “The Diffusion Process,” May, 1957, \textit{Special Report No. 18} (Agriculture Extension Service, Iowa State College), 56–77.} On whole, these were farmers who were already or had the potential to become middle-class. They valued scientific and technical expertise from larger institutions (both public and private) and believed in professionalizing the occupation. The early innovator’s propensity for consumerism and desire to increase his capital also marked him as a member of this postwar middle class.

Monsanto was so taken with the theory that they made it an official part of their emerging agricultural marketing plan. When discussing how to properly develop and market a new product, Monsanto employee J.H. Senger specifically mentioned Beal and Bohlen’s work. He remarked that the chemical corporation was aiming for, “businessmen farmers known as early adopters. Generally, he is a man who watches the innovator, watches the new products used for probably one or two years and then decides this is something that is really good.”\footnote{J.H. Senger, “Case History How a New Product is Marketing,” \textit{Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate}, June 29 and 30 1965, 22-32, Series 11, Box 2, File 5, Monsanto Collection.} Several traits of the middle class, including consumerism, value of authority, and faith in expertise, were defined as desirable assets in agribusinesses’ quest to remake farming identity.

The purpose of redefining these features was to make corporate manipulation of farmers much easier. If rural life was freed of all of its complexity, making patterns of locality legible to a centralized office, the ability to peddle an industrial and capital-intensive vision became easier.\footnote{James Scott, \textit{Seeing Like A State}, 1-9.} By fitting identity neatly into decipherable boxes, the aspects that agribusinesses wished to emphasized could now coincide with their own self-created context. Reality, they hoped, would begin to reflect their vision of agriculture. Agribusinesses hoped that farmers would begin to see themselves as middle class professionals and consumers. They would buy

\footnote{J.H. Senger, “Case History How a New Product is Marketing,” \textit{Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate}, June 29 and 30 1965, 22-32, Series 11, Box 2, File 5, Monsanto Collection.}
\footnote{James Scott, \textit{Seeing Like A State}, 1-9.}
into the standards of living that were hallmarks of the urban middle class: an emphasis on leisure and recreation, professionalization and respect for expertise, profit-motivation, differentiated work and home spaces, and materialism.

Agribusiness’ efforts to stress this middle-class identity were two-fold. Companies both propagandized their own role in helping farmers achieve this new status and offered new chances for farmers to enjoy the rewards of a consumerist lifestyle. Looking to attract new contracted growers, Perdue Chicken stressed how their farmers enjoyed independence and strong income returns (with the implication that this capital should be reinvested in the poultry operation). This was echoed by the company’s close ally, the Delmarva Poultry Industry Inc., which pronounced that changes to the industry (led by vertically integrated firms) allowed all citizens of the region to enjoy new standards of living. Corporations involved in mechanization, biotechnology, and chemicals claimed that their products allowed farmers to enjoy more profits and the convenience of modern life. In 1945, Harvester noted that its tractors allowed farmers to avoid the “back-breaking” labor of yesteryear and enjoy more leisure time.

That same year, Monsanto claimed that its DDT permanently improved the fortunes of the Filipino working class by expanding their diet. Four years later, the hybrid seed industry congratulated itself on its efforts to help American farmers profit: “Never has the American Farmer had the opportunity to benefit more from the work of thousands of Seedsmen. Never in history has the farmer been offered such high quality seed! American Agriculture is deeply indebted to you for your years of work.”

202 International Harvester, “International Harvester Presents its Post-war Farm Machines,” October 1945, 1-6, Box 524, File 11458, International Harvester Central File.
203 “A Tribute,” Right Off The Cob 4, no. 3, (Spring 1949): 1, Series 10, Box 2, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
These companies also promoted middle class identity by clearly delineating between “work,” “home,” and “leisure” spaces. Historically, farmsteads have encompassed all aspects of life: work, home, and sometimes leisure all rolled into one place. Industrial-capitalism separated these facets of human existence, often with gendered consequences. Agribusinesses’ interaction with farmers deliberately split these aspects of life, modeling patterns of urban America. Places of business became intentionally masculine and professional. They were spaces to buy goods and receive professional knowledge from specially trained experts. This was not to say that rural communities did not already contain their own gendered spaces of business. LuAnn Jones clearly showcased how country stores were often closely guarded places of white masculinity.\textsuperscript{204} But the key difference was that agribusiness wanted to introduce a regulated professionalization controlled by large bureaucracies rather than local people. Meetings would be controlled and structured after corporate guidelines. Physical spaces would be planned to fit a company-approved pattern. Even corporate events meant as celebrations, such as company sponsored Christmas parties or dinners, demarcated professional seminars (for men) and entertainment (for the rest of the family). This separation of “serious business” from other activities fundamentally changed the architecture of rural spaces. Moving away from the symmetry of work and life patterns, agribusinesses firmly placed farming into a more urban-centered patterns.

Predictably, many farmers embraced these new scientific and technological products, but on their own terms. Farmers who had the capital often adopted new technologies to increase the size and scope of their operations. Previously diversified farmsteads became increasingly specialized, with many farmers deciding to shift their focus toward specific commodities. This was especially true for livestock and dairy producers, as consumer tastes and new advancements

\textsuperscript{204} Lu Ann Jones, \textit{Mama Learned Us To Work}, 27-49.
pushed for expanded production and more exact standards. Of course, not all farmers were able
to keep up with the steadily advancing agricultural treadmill. The good times and price supports
disappeared soon after the end of the war, leading to an economy where surpluses relentlessly
pulled down market prices. Even with new agricultural policies, food programs, and the
occasional war to offset falling prices, average income for farmers plummeted from its record
highs in the forties, leaving farmers with only half of the purchasing power of non-farm
workers. By 1957, the rate of return on farm capital reached its lowest point since 1934. Compounding the problem was the rising operating cost of agriculture itself. Or as one Illinois
farmer complained, “This machine age keeps a man financially embarrassed these days.” To
meet the cost of agriculture, many farmers needed to increase their production and turned to new
products and technologies for help.

**New Products and Methods**

Farms in the postwar era became increasingly industrial and dependent on biotechnology
and mechanization. Many of these technologies had been available since the early part of the
twentieth century, including tractors and hybrid seeds. However, many farmers failed to wholly
adopt these advancements because they lacked the money to do so. This, combined with general
rural apathy or outright resistance toward outside reforms, meant that many of these scientific
developments were not widely adopted. It was not until most farmers increased their
investment capital that greater proliferation occurred. All facets of farming became increasingly
mechanized and technical, with tractors, combines, pickers, balers, choppers, and other

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207 Letter to select farmers from H. Patheal, August 22, 1956, Box 332, File 15656, International Harvester Central
File.
equipment helping farmers expand their operations and save time and labor. The availability of electricity allowed for changes to dairy and livestock agriculture. New milking parlors eased the operating intensity without losing bulk product. Feedlots, forage choppers, silo unloaders, conveyors, and dryers permitted farmers to secure feed for larger herds. Commercial hybrid seeds also fundamentally changed agriculture. Corn was the first hybrid, but hardly the last, to be adopted by farmers. Selective breeding helped scientists to develop varieties that withstood problematic conditions, worked better with mechanized pickers, resisted disease, and produced better yields.209

These modifications within agriculture owed much to the explosion of chemicals for pest control, fertilizer, and feed additives. Insecticides and herbicides became popular after World War Two. While their application could be problematic (with pests sometimes developing resistance or the chemicals negatively affecting other farm products), pesticides of all types found a welcome home among large numbers of farmers. Fertilizer also proved to be an essential part of the postwar technological revolution. Farmers had long utilized livestock waste and crop rotation to revitalize their fields. Chemical fertilizer changed the process at a very basic level. With initial gains outweighing costs, farmers rapidly adopted chemicals to get the most out of their hybrids. Livestock producers also enjoyed the use of chemicals products. Feed additives and antibiotics facilitated the growth of confinement farming and the expansion of herd and flock sizes. Growth hormones produced bigger and faster developing cattle, pigs, and chickens, which in turn enabled meat packers to generate cheaper cuts of meat for a hungry American public. No matter their application, chemicals consumption increased production across the board.210

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All in all, these changes played nicely into the major marketing projection that agribusinesses peddled: that to produce, one must first consume. In order to increase their operation size, an essential component of surviving and thriving in this new agricultural age, farmers needed to buy the new technological innovations offered by these businesses. Mechanization giants like International Harvester, John Deere, Allis-Chalmers, Case, and others boasted that their machines offered farmers “yield-boosting” potential. When Harvester sent its dealers sales manuals on their new offerings, greater production was often at the center of their sales pitch. One noted that farmers needed a combine to harvest as much as they could, avoiding preventable losses and creating a more efficient system. Another mentioned that a privately owned manure spreader improved yields and saved money. Even this increase in yield created its own cottage industry within the mechanical market, with Harvester claiming that their new three point hitch out plowed all others: “As your yields go bigger each year, you have more and more trash to plow under.”

To put a point on it, John Deere’s Director of Sales testified before Congress that mechanical equipment was the most important tool in agricultural production.

But the implement industry was hardly the only agribusiness to claim that the consumption of its products allowed more production and profit from agricultural commodities. In fact, many other types of products contended that they also increased production, including chemicals, hybrid seeds, new storage facilities, and many others. Monsanto, along with other chemical companies like DuPont and Dow, remarked that insecticides, fertilizer, and other

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213 International Harvester, “3-point hitch plows: for 2 to 4-plow tractors with 3 point hitch,” 1963, 1, Box 524, File 4369, International Harvester Central File.
chemical components boosted yield sizes, killed unwanted pests, and decreased losses. Hybrid seed houses bragged that their individualized formulas would offer farmers the greatest returns on their investment. Finally, meat producers also maintained that their operational standards, whether through contract work or more specialized product directives, allowed livestock and poultry farmers to streamline their production, increasing their numbers and profit.

One of the keys to this consumerist ideology was how these different products offered by different companies played off one another. Hybrid seeds needed chemical fertilizer to reach their full potential. Record yield required new machines to harvest such vast quantities. Confinement farming necessitated chemical additives and antibiotics as well as greater consumption of grain to feed the animals. For example, Pioneer often advocated the heavy use of commercial nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus fertilizer within their own advertisements, pamphlets, and letters. One *Pioneer Kernel* article spotlighted the use of different fertilizers, arguing that the farmer had entered a new age of chemical farming and that chemical adoption was the only way to maintain profit.\(^{215}\) Another Pioneer poster celebrated Indiana farmer A.J. Custer’s record yield while also pointedly emphasizing his heavy use of fertilizer.\(^{216}\) The company even asked its own seed growers to use pesticides like DDT to produce a better product.\(^{217}\) Though the purchase of fertilizer had no direct monetary benefit to the company, Pioneer understood that without chemicals, hybrids often failed to attain their yield goals. In turn, other companies also advocated the adoption of products other than their own. Monsanto crowed about Delmarva’s move toward contract farming and breeding efficiency programs.\(^{218}\)

\(^{215}\) *Pioneer Kernels*, March 1955, 5-11, Box 2, File 26, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

\(^{216}\) Pioneer, “New World’s Record: Pioneer Hybrid 241 Bushels Per Acre,” Box 2, File 26, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

\(^{217}\) Letter to Pioneer Grower from John Airy, May 19, 1955, Box 1, File 98, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

\(^{218}\) Monsanto, “Chicken is something but a bird! thanks to modern farmers, scientists and industry,” *Monsanto Magazine* 40, no. 4, (October 1960): 30, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
International Harvester sold products that supported chemical and confinement farming. These were just some of the many connections that created the gradual alliance between various agribusinesses across the country.

At the center of higher production came the implication of higher revenue. With higher yields, these corporations argued, came the higher profits that allowed farmers and their families to tap into the good life enjoyed by middle class Americans. In fact, profits became a critical component to the overall marketing plan of many agribusinesses. Numerous companies specifically noted that their products increased the overall profitability of the farm. As Pioneer noted in a letter to a vocational agriculture teacher, “After all, this is what the average farmer is interested in… which corn variety will make me the most money.”

But it was not just the consumption of agribusiness’ products, but also the highly industrial and capital-intensive system that these companies marketed. They argued that it was a system that would create agricultural wealth, just as their products enabled the system to operate at a high level. Proper instruction and use, as shown by company experts, would ensure farm profits. As such, many corporations developed educational outreach that stressed the profit motive. Demonstration farms, like those of Rath Packing, Pioneer, and others, showed how farmers could increase their income by changing their operation. Others, like Monsanto and International Harvester, hosted free seminars and public forums on management techniques for developing profit. Monsanto was so concerned about this that the company even established a completely separate position of crop technology manager in 1965. Looking to provide an advisory component to their company service, this manager would, “carry forward the company's program both to help the farmers keep abreast of improved farming methods and to advise them on the most profitable use of

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219 Letter to Vocational-Agricultural Teachers from H.H. Hopkins, March 9, 1955, Box 1, File 98, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
Monsanto plant food and pesticide chemicals. Such emphasis was clearly intended to showcase the possible rewards that farmers could attain if they bought the products and the system that went with it. Profit allowed better homes, more material gain, and greater personal wealth.

When promised rewards of middle-class identity did not materialize, agribusinesses also utilized negative advertisements to promote the need for greater agricultural consumerism. Specifically, agribusiness targeted fears over losing the farm to stimulate markets for their products. It was not a completely irrational fear. As already mentioned, fluctuating commodity prices and unstable markets, combined with growing overhead costs, influenced depopulation trends in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Between 1936 and 1959, nineteen million people left farming, which included fifteen percent of operators and nearly twenty-five percent of laborers. One governmental document projected that between 1955 and 1964, “an estimated 227,000 farm operators (those selling as much as $5,000 worth of farm products annually) are expected to leave the occupation.” It hypothesized that of the over two million farm boys aged ten through nineteen, only a small number would be given the opportunity to own farms. Most (but not all) farmers faced serious choices about their agricultural future, deciding to specialize and adapt to technological changes or face serious consequences that might include the loss of their land. This framework allowed for agribusinesses to exploit this anxiety to promote its version of agriculture’s future.

The key was to make those scientific and technological changes not merely profitable or attractive, but completely indispensable for any future success. As Tom Smith, Monsanto’s

220 Monsanto Public Relations Department, “News Release,” January 26, 1965, 1-2, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
newly appointed general manager of its Agricultural Chemical Division, remarked in 1960, “Chemicals are indispensable tools of today’s agriculture. They will become increasingly important as an expanding population demands quality food in abundance and at a low price from the dwindling farm labor force.”223 International Harvester warned that prudent farmers constantly looked to improve their land, indicating that tractor power was the solution to keeping the farm for generations to come.224 The North Central Weed Control Conference publicized that, “Chemicals could have saved 200-300 million bushels of corn in 1947!”225 It was an affirmation of the power of consumer-based agriculture. Adopting these products and technologies would allow the farm to survive. By doing this, the companies themselves became indispensable.

This message about consumerism played on powerful conceptions of gender identity, family responsibility, and the future. A late 1950s advertisement for Monsanto perfectly encapsulated how these companies used fear of failure to drum up consumption for their products. Featured in the Farm Journal (which the company claimed had a circulation of over three million), Monsanto noted their advertisement was, “specially designed for the dual purpose of creating a favorable view of Monsanto among farm community and direct promotion of Monsanto brand farm products.” The ad featured a man looking out over this farmstead as the sun set, dreaming, “I hope my son becomes a farmer.” The ad continued, “There's a special reward farming holds for a man; and he'd like his boy to enjoy it when he grows up. It's to serve all men and still be your own master. You feel like that when you farm your best.” This quickly

223 Monsanto Agricultural Division, “News Release,” September 1, 1960, 1, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
225 North Central Weed Control Conference, “Chemicals could have saved,” Right Off The Cob 3, no. 4, (February 1948): 15, Series 10, Box 2, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
established a romanticized view of farming and the family. The male husband and father was steward of the land and his family. It was his responsibility to care for both the land and, more importantly, the land’s future, which would rest with his son. His purpose was ultimately to pass on not just the physical space, but also the ideological benefits associated with agriculture. Health, in body, spirit, and environment, was the reward that awaited his descendants. It was his job to shepherd that gift. Once establishing these assumptions, Monsanto added the most important layer to their marketing ploy. They deliberately played on anxiety about the postwar reality of agriculture, that farmers across the nation were experiencing problematic returns. Because it was his responsibility, it would be his fault if the farm was to fail. Deciding to leave agriculture deprived his son of all of the spiritual benefits that agriculture held. This failure even denied his son the chance of full manhood, achieving independence, control, and choice. In a way then, this advertised “hope” rested not so much on the son’s future choice to become a farmer, but rather the “hope” that his father could sustain the farm long enough to pass it on.

Luckily, the corporation offered a solution to this potentially disastrous problem. In order to make the farm “the best,” and by that they meant viable, Monsanto supplied a range of products and advice to ensure this future. The advertisement stated, “Monsanto helps you farm your best by…bringing you a wide range of new and better farm chemicals, including herbicide, feed additives, wood preservatives, and fertilizer.” All of these products were created to help farmers save the future. Consumption of these products was the basis of their success and ultimately the survival of the farm into the next generation.

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227 Ibid.
Monsanto was not the only company to use this tactic and set up consumerism as vital for the continuation of rural life. International Harvester noted that even as a modern corporation enjoying the success of providing “essential” products, they could never lose sight of serving the public good.\textsuperscript{228} Its rival John Deere also felt that it had a responsibility to help farmers help themselves. With the depressing reality of labor shortages and poor prices, farmers’ demand for mechanization increased.\textsuperscript{229} Dr. H.D. Hughes (an Iowa State professor), speaking in front of three hundred Cargill hybrid salesmen, told these dealers that they played a vital role in improving the farming techniques of their neighbors.\textsuperscript{230} Garst and Thomas, as part of Pioneer, claimed that their hybrids and their dealers served farmers and assisted the community.\textsuperscript{231} No wonder Monsanto later adopted the slogan, “Improving agriculture, improving lives.”

Overall, the subtext was not about selling physical products, but selling consumerism as a basic necessity of agricultural operations. It was not enough to get farmers to buy products or accept more household expenses. Farmers had to believe that buying was now a part of farming, as important as plowing a field or milking a cow. Or as one Monsanto marketer would note, “Asking customer to buy a function rather than a chemical.”\textsuperscript{232} The function in this case was to create consumerism as an essential part of being a farmer.

\textbf{Conclusion: Making The New Farmer}

\textsuperscript{228} International Harvester, “The Distribution of Farm Equipment,” circa 1940s-1950s, 1, Box 321, File 08445, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{229} John Deere, “Makers of Plenty: John Deere…the Man and the Company,” 1962, 15, Box 551, File 08816, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{230} “New Cargill Plant,” Right Off The Cob 4, no 1 (November 1948): 5, Series 10, Box 2, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{231} Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, June 25, 1956, 1-2, Box 3, File 32, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{232} J.H. Senger, “Case History How a New Product is Marketing,” Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate, June 29 and 30, 1965, 22-34, Series 11, Box 11, File 5, Monsanto Collection.
With its first issue in the 1960s, Successful Farming published an editorial speculating about how farming would change in the next ten years. The writer theorized that family farms would persist despite the forces of industrialization, incorporation, and vertical integration. However, in the face of these changes, farms would grow larger, more commercialized, more specialized, and more efficient. In order to stay competitive, farmers would adopt new technologies and embrace advanced scientific methods. Above all, farms needed to be thought of as a scientific and business endeavor, “Farming is changing from a business of arts and crafts to a business of science. This change is only beginning. Much agricultural production in crops and livestock still is more dependent upon arts than science. Results are not wholly predictable.”

Success, the journal implied, was based on predictability, a trait difficult to come by in these changing times. But not everything was discouraging, “We are in a period of major change. But change is not necessarily bad.”

What was perhaps most interesting about this editorial was not its predictions (which mostly came true), but rather its sincere belief that these changes were still to come and not already here. Scrolling back through the issue, articles, columns, and advertisements all told a different story. Articles and columns emphasized new scientific discoveries and their possible applications on the farm. Crop and livestock reports, with their focus on commodity outlooks and pricing, provided valuable commercial information for the business-minded farmer. Above all though, consumerism lay at the heart of the journal. Advertisements for fertilizer, tractors, machinery, breeding stock, hybrids, gasoline, pesticide, and other products peppered every page. Not to be neglected, household products and domestic goods appeared throughout, with a

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specific section offering a consumer guide for the latest in homemaking. These products, new information, expert advice, and unspoken hopes all signaled an expectation of middle class living for their rural readers.

Rural people were not the only target of larger institutional emphasis on middle class identity in postwar America. Politicians, industry leaders, retailers, and a booming economy all encouraged white workers across the lower socio-economic spectrum to enter into a new relationship with consumerism, one built on credit and greater household expenditures. As Elaine Tyler May noted, much of postwar focus on the normalizing power of the middle class was built on the purchase of commodities. May wrote, “Consumerism provided a means for assimilation into the American way of life: classless, homogeneous, and family-centered.” For rural people, this push was hardly a new phenomenon. Many institutions of the past, long before the postwar period, attempted to integrate urban middle class values within rural communities.

Yet, the efforts of agribusiness to retrain the values and expectations of farmers reached a different level of success than many of the attempts in the past. Consumption of not just farm products but also household goods soared. Families who could afford to often invested in new machinery, equipment, and household upgrades, allowing them to increase their yield potential (while also adding to their debt). For those who could not, the choices were often limited: finding a different form of income or leaving altogether. The result was a farming population that increasingly held middle class values and also was able to meet the standards of this socio-economic status.

Agribusinesses propagandized these expectations because they believed it would further their economic interests. Farmers who saw themselves as consumers, as laborers who needed

235 May, Homeward Bound, 158-164.
new products to save time and make money, were a much more receptive audience than a community that could “make do.” Yet, creating a new type of middle class farmer was not simply changing how farmers saw themselves, but how farmer saw members of their local community. After all, “making do” was as much about personal sacrifice as it was working within local exchange networks. The key, agribusinesses quickly surmised, was to alter the standards by which farmers judged each other. Seeing an opportunity to integrate more fully into local systems, companies promoted two other elements of urban middle class living, that of competition and capitalism within the rural community.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMPETITION, COMMUNITY, AND CAPITALISM: IDENTITY MANIPULATIONS

In the spring of 1955, a new corn king was crowned. A.J. Custer, a longtime resident of DeKalb County, Indiana, boasted a record setting 241 bushels per acre. The contest, verified by agronomists from Purdue University, made Custer an instant rural celebrity within the region. It was hardly the first time the ambitious farmer had made headlines. A mere three years earlier, Custer captured his first state yield championship with a smaller yield of 191 bushels per acre. Even then, Custer was well known for his determined use of new technologies and soil treatment, a mentality that Extension agronomists praised as “good practices.” Custer’s university-approved methods only intensified after his victory, as he and his five sons eventually became symbols of the “modern” way of farming.

However, Custer also represented a marketing opportunity for the seed house Pioneer. Deep in its own battle with other hybrid companies and state certified growers, Custer was a prospect that Pioneer just could not afford to pass up. So the company decided to use the Indiana farmer as symbol of the company’s quality, a face for Pioneer in the rural community. They soon entered into a business relationship, with Pioneer celebrating him in advertisements and newsletters. Custer in turn agreed to set aside five acres of his land as a demonstration farm, allowing regional dealers a place to show potential customers the possibilities of Pioneer. Though a series of disagreements sometimes threatened the rapport, Custer and Pioneer maintained a working relationship through the 1950s. Both partners received something they

coveted. Custer collected free seed corn, payments, and recognition, a boon for an ambitious farmer. The company gained a much needed symbol, a face to denote exactly what they desired out of a farmer-customer. A.J. Custer and his relationship with Pioneer was just one link in the chain between changing conceptions of farming identity and the influence of agribusiness.

As America entered the postwar period, agribusinesses undertook a concerted effort to remake the identity of farmers. These companies desired a model that best fit their own goal: making agribusiness an indispensable part of agricultural life. They advocated for changes to how farmers thought of themselves, their labor, their community, and their stewardship of the land. It was a little more challenging than it sounded. Farmers, on whole, were not easy to define. Even the name defied a simple definition. On the surface, a farmer looked exactly like AJ Custer: a white male head of his household who farmed large plots of specific crops. Of course, that suggestion of homogeneity would be nothing but a false image. Farmers, as a definable group, are people who produce crops or livestock for various purposes. But more exact characteristics are much more difficult to identify. Factors such as environment, cultural values, community configuration, and the direction of the political economy (not to mention local features) make classification extremely difficult. Why then did agribusinesses make identification and promotion of certain traits so important? Ultimately, the reasons rest on issues of legibility and the possible benefits to be gained by this manipulation. By propagandizing attributes that worked best in their desired system of agriculture, agribusinesses also identified what a farmer was solely based on these traits. In doing so, they could codify correct behaviors and values that matched their larger quest to infiltrate the rural community.

Both Michel Foucault and James Scott have discussed the connections between legibility, control, and power. Foucault argued that recent conceptions of punishment, as in the prison system, cannot be separated from the modernization of society itself. The need to observe and control delinquents is part of a “carceral” grid that also regulates the citizenry. In a similar vein, Scott maintained that developing states have often attempted to impose standards (weights and measures, last names, etc.) on complex societal interactions and local knowledge. These governmental entities did so in order to better police their subjects, applying rationalism to remake the social order. This desire to identify and then control was not just a feature of governmental bodies, but also underscored aspects of the modern industrial complex, including agribusinesses. Companies involved in agriculture, like all businesses, sought to influence the beliefs of their customers and restructure their value systems into one that best suited corporate needs. The diffusion of a value system also relates to Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony. Articulated by Gramsci and expanded by numerous other scholars, cultural hegemony describes how the ruling class uses culture to reinforce and support its continued domination of a diverse society. Agribusinesses deliberately propagandized the features of competition and business acumen because they directly benefited their status within the larger industry and rural community. Boosted by political allies and a belief in technological determinism, agribusinesses tried to instill their own cultural values within farmers.

Therefore this third chapter will focus on how and why agribusinesses promoted competition and business acumen within the rural community. Like with gender and labor

standards, agribusinesses also sought to influence how farmers thought of themselves and their relationships within agricultural networks. As the second chapter showed, agribusinesses wanted farmers to see themselves as middle class consumers. This coincided with the idea that consumption of agribusiness’ products gave farmers a competitive edge. Due to the stress of economic fluctuations, agribusinesses also needed to convince farmers that competition within the rural community was itself good and necessary. Instead of seeing other farmers as pieces of an interconnected community network, agribusinesses encouraged competition between farmers. This was done for two reasons. One, farmers would see other farmers as competition and therefore hopefully come to depend more on agribusinesses for help and expertise, rather than their neighbors. Secondly, new understandings of competition as a necessary and natural part of the modern agricultural system would also weaken any growing concerns about rural depopulation (one that might extend back to criticism of companies that were directly profiting from overproduction). By portraying struggling farmers as inefficient or unambitious, agribusiness could continue to push for higher yields without answering questions about overproduction and its effect on rural communities. It was proverbial agricultural Darwinism.

Finally, along with changes to ideas about consumerism and competition, agribusinesses also wanted to reconfigure how farmers viewed the agricultural process itself. Instead of understanding farming as a lifestyle, agribusiness actively encouraged farmers to regard it as a business, one couched in the value system of industrial capitalism. As businessmen, farmers would now treat fields and yields with the same expansive eye as factory owners. Values of efficiency, standardization, scientific management, and profit would now rule the day. This, in turn, would drive even greater acceptance of agribusiness as essential to modern agriculture.

**Competition, Agribusiness, and the Rural Community**
Competition, of course, was an essential component of capitalism and the fundamental interaction point between businesses, including those companies engaged in agriculture. This was not always the case with farmers though, which could prove to be a problem for agribusinesses and the system they promoted. Localized patterns of exchange did not automatically provide a fertile ground for a commercial system that depended first on outside entities (both input and output). Instead, agribusinesses wished to change how individual farmers and their communities viewed competition and cooperation. These companies encouraged farmers to view one another not as necessary pieces of an interconnected network, but rather as business competitors. Competition would, they argued, drive deserving and efficient farmers towards success while culling the economic deadweight from the marketplace. Mutuality had no place in the world of Big Agriculture.

In order to truly understand why agribusiness promoted new competitive standards between their customers, it is critical to first understand the relationship between local economic forces in many rural communities. Despite the persisting myth of independence, most farmers in America operated within a system of localized community cooperation and informal exchange for basic survival. Throughout history, farming itself required large numbers of workers to operate effectively. Agricultural labor featured long periods of dormancy, punctuated by short bursts of intense seasonal activity. Threshing, harvesting, binding, moving commodities to barns or to towns, canning, slaughtering, and many other necessary agricultural tasks required more labor than one family could usually provide. In American agriculture, communal support was critical for overall community health.

This took many forms. The most simple were basic commodity and service exchanges between households. One farmstead might provide eggs in exchange for a quilt or milk. A family
might offer the labor of one of their children to gain access to a needed piece of equipment. Neighbors would pitch in to help raise a barn with the specific understanding that, in turn, they would reciprocate when the time came. Harvesting and threshing especially showcased the necessary coordination in small communities. Families would rotate labor to help to bring in the crops. It was a system that assured not just the wellbeing of individual farms, but a community as a whole. Neighborhood obligation meshed well with an organization of family labor that emphasized sharing and making do. While farmers utilized cash and capital to engage in long distance trade and to procure outside goods, they also continued to employ a system of barter long into the twentieth century. Though larger economic forces, both national and global, definitely affected agriculture, localized community involvement could and certainly did mitigate some of these effects. This is not to romanticize older forms of agriculture. Mutuality only went so far, especially when social and economic pressures threatened. Gender, racial, ethnic, and religious tension could incite violence, drive away community members, and lead to endemic poverty. But overall, local exchange was a crucial factor in the survival of agricultural communities and one that rural people often deliberately sought out. Small farming towns survived in part because of the willingness of residents to work together, formally and informally.

The New Deal signaled a new direction in the changing perception of competition and cooperation in rural spaces. Influenced by their Mexican neighbors, some New Deal reformers sought to radically alter the countryside by confronting ingrained problems of inequality, poverty, and environmental decline. Called the “agrarian” New Deal by historian Tore Olsson,

244 Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 1-9 and 41-44.
he described this ideological strain of reform as, “a host of often dissonant programs that targeted culture, environment, poverty, land tenure, and fostering of rural democracy.”

Aimed particularly at the American South, programs like the Farm Security Administration and the Resettlement Administration represented a real promise of redistribution of wealth. Unlike its Mexican counterpart, however, lack of federal commitment stunted these programs’ wider opportunities. Facing vicious opposition by commercial farmers and USDA colleagues, the agrarian New Deal failed to live up to its radical promise.

On the other hand, while agrarian reformers crusaded against inequality, the agricultural New Deal favored larger cultivators and other commercial interests, like agribusiness. Headed by the powerful Agricultural Adjustment Administration, these programs sought primarily to lower production and boost commodity prices. While the emphasis on rural America allowed Democrats to build a new rural constituency, it did little to alleviate the problems of the most vulnerable farmers, including tenants, sharecroppers, and small farmers. As the depression continued, many policy-makers came to believe that this agricultural underclass was the source of many problems. Many alleged that these small farmers, who seemed both inefficient and ignorant, depressed food prices and drained valuable government aid best left to others willing to adopt to large-scale agriculture. Therefore, the best way to relieve economic pressure on agriculture was to essentially encourage poor farmers to leave farming all together.

The Second World War proved to be a critical boon for farmers and a federal government attempting to negotiate a stable ground between production and price controls. The increased

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247 Ibid, 40-72.
248 Ibid, 40-72.
249 Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-21 and 200-238.
need for foodstuffs almost immediately improved commodity prices and farm incomes across the board. The federal government, encouraged by the powerful farm bloc, put policies in place to reduce the possibility of a postwar agricultural collapse, a legacy of the consequences of World War One. The results were golden years of prosperity for many of the nation’s farmers in the 1940s. Financially secure for the first time in decades, farmers reinvested their capital back into the farm, bought new implements, upgraded their operations, or paid off debts. In the end, however, the good times could not last forever. By 1949, the problem of surpluses again reared its ugly head and the federal government once again dealt with the problem of plenty. Even the Korean War and other conflicts provided only brief reprieves from this continuing agricultural dilemma.²⁵⁰

Federal policy makers in the postwar era attempted to balance persistent overproduction with acceptable commodity prices. It was a difficult situation that plagued farmers, agricultural specialists, economists, and bureaucrats in the years following the Second World War. Technological and scientific advancements exacerbated surpluses, as farmers adopting new technologies produced more and more commodities to secure acceptable prices. They did so in part to make up for falling food prices and rising operating costs. In essence, farmers became trapped in a price-squeeze on both sides, leading to falling income and greater depopulation. In response to these problems, federal policy-makers came to the same conclusion as those late depression-era bureaucrats: that small farms were dragging down the agricultural market. Whether too small, too uneducated, or simply unwilling to change, policy makers believed that these yeomen lacked the ability to adapt to the changing nature of agriculture. Their inefficiency sucked valuable resources away from others and their production only added to surplus

headaches. Therefore, bureaucrats at the USDA embraced programs and policy, like acreage restrictions and lower parity for commodities, which would encourage more small producers to leave agriculture. Policy makers eventually looked to lessen government intervention in the agricultural economy.\textsuperscript{251}

Ultimately, the direction of these federal policies fit nicely with agribusinesses’ own conception of competition within the rural community. The federal government was interested in controlling surpluses though increased efficiency and the winnowing of the farm population. Agribusinesses saw competition as the solution to this problem. Agribusinesses, too, accepted the notion that small operators hurt the overall farm economy, holding those equipped with the right kind of knowledge and skills captive in a stale and worn out system. Understandably these corporate entities did not want all farmers to disappear any more than the federal government wanted another farm crisis. Poor commodity prices affected farmer income, which then directly influenced consumption of company products. Economic downturns could severely hurt sales numbers. As A. B. Connell, director of sales for John Deere, remarked, “No one is more interested in having agriculture prosper than we are. Our livelihood depends upon it.”\textsuperscript{252} Instead, they desired the removal of those who could not or would not buy their products, or more problematically, buy into the highly industrial system of agriculture they were advocating. Wealthy farmers, who thought of themselves as middle class businessmen and who shared similar conceptions of competition, were excellent examples for the rest of the countryside.

One of the main pillars of agribusinesses’ vision of modern agriculture rested on the reassessment of the role competition played in rural communities, communities to which the

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid, 97-123.
companies desperately wanted to belong. Agribusinesses sought to highlight their importance as not just a necessary function of economic development but also as a critical aspect of the whole agricultural endeavor. Competition, these corporations argued, held intrinsic value for the modern farming operation. Like the need to consume new agricultural advancements, competition “naturally” propelled farmers to become more successful. It forced them to adopt better management, techniques, and technology, which in turn created a more profitable, productive, and efficient farms. A more successful farm meant that farm families were able to enjoy all the fruits of a middle class lifestyle, including more leisure time and material goods. It also proved the quality of the farmer himself, a man who possessed both the virtue of his predecessors and the shrewd business mind necessary to modern life. Of course, the implicit drawback of economic competition was its negative impact on those who failed to make the necessary changes. After all, in order for agriculture to have winners, agribusiness need to create losers.

Yet, agribusiness actually framed this seemingly negative aspect of competition as part of a constructive process: removing the inefficient and freeing the market of regulatory forces. Just as farmers culled their livestock with undesirable traits, so too did the countryside need to remove those unwilling to adapt to the modern operation. The editors of Successful Farming hoped that continued pressure would push smaller, inefficient farms out of the market. They argued that these farmers pulled down commodity prices, punishing others who had successfully adopted efficient management and applied science. In the end then, collaboration between inefficient and commercial farms did not make financial sense. So instead of supporting struggling farmers, companies wanted their customers to see these neighbors as unworthy of continued local

cooperation. Competition, therefore, helped separate the metaphorical wheat from the chaff. This separation would create a better marketplace and more successful farming practices, which in turn would lead to a more prosperous countryside and nation.

The celebration of competition was partly because agribusinesses faced heavy competition throughout their own development. McCormick Harvesting Machine Company confronted such intense economic competition that it eventually merged with four of its competitors in 1902 to form International Harvester.\(^{254}\) Vying against John Deere, Allis-Chalmers, Massey-Ferguson, and others, International raced to see who could produce more efficient and better varieties of implements. Monsanto competed against other large chemical companies, like DuPont and Dow, to corner the budding agricultural market for fertilizer and pesticides. Pioneer battled not only large rival seed houses like Funk’s, DeKalb, and Pfister, but also small local companies that offered specific regional varieties. Because of the nature of seed corn development, these small seed companies often had strong ties to state land-grants and experiment stations.\(^{255}\) At times, these ties proved to be so strong that they actually prevented other corporations from working with agricultural colleges (as with Purdue University) or even selling within a state (Georgia and West Virginia). Meat producers faced their own issues when it came to competition within the industry. Changes in consumer taste, biotechnology, and retail forced companies to adapt or fail. Chicken consumption increased the opportunities for vertically integrated firms to push out smaller competition. On the other hand, pork producers had to reinvent the conception of pork as a food to stay competitive in an increasingly difficult market.\(^{256}\)

\(^{254}\) The merger proved to be so prosperous that the federal government successfully sued the company under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1914. The split proved to be short-lived however, as the company reformed in the coming decades.


\(^{256}\) Jenny Barker-Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm*, 113-137.
Competition was, therefore, the fire that helped forge these companies into their postwar configuration and often forced companies to change their business methods. For example, the growth of wholesale grocery stores (as opposed to specialty shops) forced meat packers to change their relationship with these stores. Worried about wholesale buying power, Rath Packing created a specific marketing program to help its salesmen grow closer to the retailers.\textsuperscript{257} The use of coupons was another tactic the meat packer came to employ in the postwar era, both to introduce its products to new areas and to drum up support for pork. While couponing could be expensive, the board of directors figured that housewives liked coupons because they “represent real cash savings at the time of purchases,” and would seem like an overall bargain.\textsuperscript{258} Like Rath, Monsanto also changed its business outreach based on competitive factors. Facing falling ammonia prices and new market competitors in the mid-1960s, the company decided to open its own franchises in rural communities across America. By franchising these “MAC” centers, Monsanto looked to bypass middlemen and sell directly to farmers.\textsuperscript{259} Each one of these companies stood in a food and fiber economy that offered expansion opportunities but also contained a minefield of potential pitfalls.

It was through their relationships with each other, both as possible rivals and allies, that these companies crystalized their vision of competition for themselves and for their customers. In the dog eat dog world of the postwar agricultural market, many small and middling companies soon found themselves swallowed up by larger corporations. The seed-corn industry offered a glimpse into this trend of consolidation. With the refinement of hybrids in the early twentieth

\textsuperscript{257} Rath Packing Company, “Outline of May Sales Meeting: Wholesaler Meat Programs,” May 1964, 3-17, Series 3, Box 1, File 3, Rath Packing Company Records.
\textsuperscript{258} Rath Packing Company, “Outline of May Sales Meeting: Sliced Meat Promotion,” May 1964, 2-6, Series 3, Box 1, File 3, Rath Packing Company Records.
\textsuperscript{259} “Chemical Week Kirkpatrick Award Report-Program,” December 2, 1964, 6-8, Series 13, Box 1, File 15, Monsanto Collection.
century, hundreds of local companies, especially in the Corn Belt, sprang up to meet the budding demand.\textsuperscript{260} Gradually, larger and more well-connected seed houses began to separate themselves from local and eventually regional suppliers. The houses quickly acquired these smaller businesses as they failed on the open market, adding the best local varieties to the companies’ seed lines. Pioneer, DeKalb, Pfister, and others co-opted former small time seed growers and well-respected seed evaluators into the larger company structure through either contract work or buy outs.\textsuperscript{261} For example, in 1956, DeKalb bought out the Cornhusker Hybrid Corn Company of central Nebraska, a move that did not go unnoticed by their closest competitor, Pioneer. In an internal memo, Roswell Garst cautioned the company’s regional directors not to overlook the acquisition. Cornhusker’s hybrids were top-notch and their breeders originally connected to another prominent rival, Lester Pfister. While they out-performed other state hybrids (including Pioneer’s), Cornhusker could no longer compete because of their outdated equipment. Instead of investing in new and expensive technology, they sold to DeKalb. In the end, Garst commented that their rival buyout was not necessarily a bad thing for Pioneer, “All this does not scare me, nor disturb me. I just think it means harder work and greater planning and tougher competition, which will probably do all of us good.”\textsuperscript{262}

\textsuperscript{260} “Seed Signs” collected by Iowa Crop Improvement Association, Estimated range from 1930s-1950s, Boxes 1-5, Seed Company Sign Collection, MS 199, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library. Hereafter known as Seed Sign Collection.

\textsuperscript{261} Long before the domination of a few large seed companies, Pioneer was just one of many different organizations looking to cash in breeding advancements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hundreds of small companies (and very prominent ones like Dekalb and Funk’s) sprang p across the Corn Belt, though very few had the political connections of early Pioneer Hi-Bred. The company was founded in 1926 by one of Iowa’s favorite sons, Henry Wallace. This future Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President grew up under the mantle of his father and grandfather, prominent farm journal editors, agricultural reformers, and politicians. As he entered Iowa State University, Wallace encountered the emerging field of plant breeding. It was a fascination that would stay with him all his life, even after he became editor to his father’s paper. Working quietly on his wife’s property in the 1920s, Wallace gradually built up the impressive stock of hybrids that eventually became Pioneer. “A History of Pioneer’s First Ten Years,” Undated, 2-4, Box 1, File 32, Pioneer Hi-Bred International Records.

\textsuperscript{262} Letter to Wayne Skidmore, Raymond Baker, Bob Woods, and Hugh Morrison from Roswell Garst, June 1, 1956, 1-2, Box 3, File 30, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
Garst’s response echoed the understanding of competition held by other successful and growing agribusinesses: that competition made the best stronger, and therefore bred accomplishment and progress. Garst was not afraid of DeKalb’s growth because he thought their acquisitions would push his own company to be more resilient. It was a combination of simple capitalist ideology and economic Darwinism, Adam Smith’s invisible hand working to ensure the survival of the fittest. Even when faced with the competition, John Deere’s Public Relations department noted that competition, “stimulated and accelerated [the company], rather than stifled the benefits for farm and industry.” And for those flailing in the wake of this consolidation, their trouble was a product of their own failure to adapt to the marketplace. Frank Perdue noted that most independent chicken breeders failed because they lacked the necessary management skills to keep up with the rest of the growing industry. When a Massey-Harris’ tractor dealer complained about Pioneer’s exclusion of Massey tractors’ seed plate size (a piece of equipment needed for corn planting) in their publicized seed charts, Pioneer’s response was predictably scornful. George Leininger, a representative for Pioneer, contemptuously replied that the seed house’s calibration man identified a number of issues with Massey-Harris faulty equipment. Consequently the company was unable to secure a proper plate recommendation, implying that Massey-Harris products were inferior in nature. One Monsanto corporate objective spoke of the need to fight “maturity,” a sign that the company had reached its maximum growth and could no longer be driven to find new opportunities. Still holding onto this

263 Of course, not all other agricultural companies were so enthusiastic about the role of competition within their own industry, especially those companies that were suffering from declining sales. By the 1960s, Rath Packing struggled with falling sales, pork production issues, and labor problems. “Product Sales Trends Branch Markets: Five Fiscal Years,” 1962, Series 8, Box 41, File 2, Rath Packing Company Records.


266 Letter to Glen Keller from George Leininger, January 19, 1955, Box 1, File 102, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
idea five years later, Monsanto noted that it must drop the “unworthy,” strive for originality, and continue to expand via vertical integration or lateral expansion.\textsuperscript{267} Clearly, notions of competition and survival influenced how companies understood their own development and success. From their point of view, economic struggle had made their corporations better, more efficient, and more productive. It seemed that competition was a natural force of progress itself. No wonder Pioneer told its salesmen to “be thankful for competition.”\textsuperscript{268}

This corporate notion of competition was definitely a conception agribusinesses wished to integrate more fully into farmers’ view of themselves and their communities. Instead of functioning as an integral part of a localized network of exchange, these corporations encouraged farmers to view competition, not cooperation, as the primary driver of their success. Just as economic rivalry pushed companies to innovate and become better, so too would competition between farmers make individual agricultural operations more successful. Therefore competition within the community, even between neighbors and friends, was necessary and ultimately good for the well-being of agriculture itself.

One way for individuals to stay ahead of the competition, agribusinesses argued, was to embrace new techniques and products. This would allow them a competitive advantage over others slower to adopt to a more specialized, industrial mindset. Older practices, including greater crop rotation and diversification, were now unnecessary on the modern farm. One Pioneer sales letter noted that many farmers were abandoning old rotations because they were too costly. The letter promised, “those of you who are farmers should abandon rotations--that

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{267} Internal Memo To RM Lawrence, Shea Smith, WH Winfield, RW Crawford, “Business Research in Monsanto,” February 20, 1951, 3-4; Monsanto, “Monsanto's Objectives Are,” June 13, 1957, Series 10, Box 3, File 21, Monsanto Collection.
\item \textsuperscript{268} Pioneer Kernels, November 1954, 9, Box 2, File 26, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
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You will make more money if you do abandon rotations.” Other companies also emphasized the ability of their products to increase profit. International Harvester repeatedly identified their products as "profit-boosting” implements that would help farmers retain their own farm’s viability. New drill planters allowed their farm’s seedlings that “important early step.”

Personal hammer mills allowed farmers to skip community milling and grind their own feed.

Power forage feeders turned cattle feeding into a one-man job. This emphasis on singular labor for profit and commercial advantage fit effortlessly into agribusiness’ own understanding of agriculture, one where competition pushed individuals to become better and more self-sufficient. When discussing the Iowa State Fair in their company magazine, Monsanto highlighted the competitive nature of event. Remarking that the fair “throbbed” with competition, the chemical company emphasized how the best product sold for excellent prices.

Again, the intersection between profit, success, and contests reinforced how agribusinesses viewed the role of competition.

Monsanto especially underlined how competition molded farmers to become more successful by using idealized examples from the community. The men (always men) the company featured represented the traits that the company desired: faith in science and technology, business acumen, expansive productivity, willingness to accept outside expertise and, of course, a belief in competition. After all, “unless a farmer is advanced technologically, unless he treats his farm as a business and applies to it sound management principles, he cannot

273 Monsanto, “To Win a Blue Ribbon,” Monsanto Magazine 32, no. 3, (August-September 1953), 13-16, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
compete in today's markets.” In an article highlighting five exemplary corn farmers, each man embodied a story of successful competition. Elmer Hohenstein of Minnesota, who worked his way up from a tenant farmer to owner of 600 acres, credited his success to competitive investments. Don Rakes of Waverly, Illinois used the concept of "base exchange capacity" to gain the upper hand. Russell Arndt of La Crosse, Indiana admitted that, “the whole apparatus of modern American business methods must become a part of farming.” All of these men used the tools of scientific agriculture to get and stay ahead of their neighbors, showcasing that success was born out of economic struggle within the community. These corn farmers succeed because of their willingness to become and stay competitive and to use new products to increase their advantage over others, sometimes even at the cost of their neighbors’ failure.

Fundamentally, this perception affirmed that competition in and of itself was a rewarding enterprise, leading those determined enough down the road to success. Perdue Chicken argued that their breeding contract program was inherently competitive and thus, “it is a rewarding business.” Those farmers who were unable to meet Perdue’s high standards would naturally be separated from those who could, leaving only the best to receive the reward of profit and satisfaction. John Harms, the agricultural editor for Kiplinger Washington (a Washington D.C. based business-forecast publisher), believed that great prosperity awaited farmers who survived the market upheaval. He wrote, “By the year 1970, there is going to be a rising boom in agriculture that will make farmers forget the searing headaches of 1967. By 1975, farmers will be king of the hill!” Pioneer assured their seeds dealers on multiple occasions that despite

274 Monsanto, “Are These the "New" Farmers?: Sketches of five outstanding corn growers help answer the question,” Monsanto Magazine 48, no. 1, 1968, 18-22, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
275 Ibid, 18-22.
cancellations by struggling farmers, their more aggressive neighbors would soon expand their operations and therefore pick up the leftover seed. Overall, they argued, the future looked bright for the farmers who successfully adapted to new competitive standards in the market. Competition was part of an organic process that uplifted the innovators and left behind the rest.

Agribusinesses particularly advocated this new understanding of competition when it came to their interaction with a certain target audience, farm children. As David Danbom, Charles Rosenberg, Mary Neth, and Gabriel Rosenberg have all shown, child-focused groups have long been the vehicle used by outside institutions looking to influence rural communities. Rosenberg’s *The 4-H Harvest* specifically detailed that 4-H fostered a growing intimacy between rural children and capitalist institutions. One goal of the organization was to sell capital-intensive agriculture to rural communities (including reluctant parents) through children. Retailers of input industries had much to gain by developing this relationship. As Rosenberg noted, “bankers and businessmen gave cheap loans and prizes to 4-H in the belief that it would prime the sale of financial products for the next generation of farmers.” It was a marketing tool that could prove useful for building a future client base.

In order to further their economic goals, one that featured a highly competitive and agribusiness dependent market, these corporate entities targeted children with different activities and contests that emphasized competition over cooperation. For example, when Perdue Chicken decided to increase its advertising towards farmers, the company surveyed employees at Ralston Purina, Agway, Central Soya, and Eshelman Feeds to help understand that demographic. Out of all the responses they received, the most consistent suggestion centered on fostering company

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278 Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, February 15, 1960, Box 8, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
280 Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest*, 55.
connections to rural youth groups. Simply put, organizations like 4-H or FFA were effective image-builders for long-term success. Purina’s advertising department head stated that Perdue should give facility tours to 4-H and FFA members, because some of these kids would one day be their future employees or customers. Others added that sponsorship of youth projects was great free publicity in rural spaces. Agway’s head of advertising noted that program sponsorship looked unselfish and put the company on the same level as local farmers. Fred Walters, director of Central Soya’s public relations department, advised Perdue to “Identify yourself with groups that farmers feel are important.” He continued, “FFA and 4H are key to future business and image of the company. Build some amount of loyalty with farm people by supporting their children’s activities, also county agents and Vo-ag teachers.”

Company recognition was a critical sources of support. These corporations acknowledged that they needed to be seen as part of the community or “on level” with locals. Just as they attempted to foster competition, agribusinesses understood that their cooperation was inherent to any possible success they might have. Therefore, aiding local children’s groups accomplished a two-fold task; it both introduced their future customer base to a certain set of values and made the company look magnanimous.

It was these companies’ choice of collaboration that allowed them to both integrate their business into the wider rural community and promote their own interpretation of competition. By choosing to focus on contests between children, rather than cooperation or team building, they encouraged these future farmers to see one another as fellow competitors in the market, rather than allies within the agricultural process. Competition would drive away those unprepared to adjust to modernity, so these challenges, even though small and local, were important.

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experiences for the future generation. Frank Perdue echoed this sentiment by noting that parents wanted their children to further their education. “More and more parents are realizing the necessity for their children to be well educated in our competitive society,” he wrote. Of course, the “winners” of these contests, those who produced the best yields or the largest steer, would in turn be “rewarded” by the companies. Rath Packing purchased the best pens of livestock from 4-H members at local contests. Pioneer rewarded youth contest winners with trophies, plaques, and free bushels of their seed corn. This exchange symbolized what the companies sought in the rural community as a whole: a contest that would drive greater consumerism of input products, create better output commodities, and which would in turn reward those who successfully adapted to the new system, one which placed agribusiness at the center of the industry.

Why did agribusiness promote this conception so intensely? The question has several answers. First, corporations wanted to make themselves and their products completely necessary to the operation of agriculture. In order to achieve this, they needed to retain elements of expertise and authority. Companies needed to ensure that rural people saw these large businesses as part of the agricultural community. Agribusiness desired farmers to depend on companies (specifically their company), not their neighbors, kin, or other local forces. Even other sources of traditional agricultural authority, like the land-grants, USDA, or experiment stations, could sometimes be seen as threats to this position. In seeing other farmers as possible competitors.

285 Even with agribusinesses’ generally cozy relationship with public scientists, a certain amount of tension always existed. Like prior relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, colleges and companies continued to argue over control and authority. While companies courted and used land-grant institutions and the state extension
instead of indispensable parts of their own work, agribusiness hoped farmers would transfer their needs onto the companies. This would reframe very basic understandings of the rural community. Instead of limiting communal relationships to local physical spaces and people, this idea of community would grow to encompass abstract institutions that had no real corporeal presence in the farmers’ immediate area beyond a dealer or store. While a farmer could talk to a seed dealer or visit a Harvester store, he or she could never completely touch or see the full extent of the corporation. At its core, agribusinesses hoped competition would vastly widen agricultural communities, expanding what and who was involved. The world, they hoped, had just gotten a lot bigger.

Second, by persuading farmers to accept these new standards of competition, these corporations were looking to sidestep any criticism of their own involvement in current agricultural problems, namely surpluses and the trend of depopulation in the countryside. It was clear that rural communities were facing difficult times after the Second World War, with millions unable to keep up with the new costs of operation. Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson once complained that the technological explosion almost guaranteed low commodity prices.²⁸⁶ It was a criticism that could easily be traced back to the companies directly benefiting from this overproduction. Resentment of rising implement prices eventually caused Congress to call a representative from John Deere to appear before the House Agriculture committee in 1961. While expressing concern about the rising price of farm equipment, A.B. Connell (director of

²⁸⁶ Hurt, Problems of Plenty, 113.
sales at John Deere) maintained that the causes were beyond the company’s control. This was an unpleasant event that other involved businesses within the industry wished to avoid entirely.

Luckily, changing understandings of competition offered agribusinesses a convenient scapegoat. They increasingly portrayed struggling farmers as inefficient or poor managers, incapable of adopting new scientific techniques. They were, the businesses asserted, undeserving of the mantle of “farmer,” and their exit was ultimately good for the community as a whole. They were casting depopulation as a positive force. As such, corporations and their allies never had to analyze their own impact on agricultural problems. Corporate offices did not assess the possible unintended consequences of their own products and their effect on rural spaces. It was a tactic that would allow the companies to avoid blame as more and more rural Americans left agriculture altogether.

This dovetailed nicely with the dual understandings of competition’s new role in the rural community. Not only would it make the agricultural process stronger and more successful, it would also remove any incompetent producers who wasted resources. Seth Shaw, an employee of the supermarket chain Safeway, argued that the food and fiber industry (including farmers) must remove all “obstacles to competition---blockages to the most efficient, orderly flow of product through the production and marketing system.” While this had resulted in some farmers leaving agriculture, on whole it had made the industry more profitable and effective. Pioneer’s Roswell Garst observed that inefficient farmers who failed to adequately utilize new scientific advantages would (and ultimately should) quit, leaving agriculture to others more suited to the

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modern operation. Frank Perdue admitted that some farmers would have to leave the poultry industry. However, he claimed that once the poultry industry was held by a smaller, more sensible group of individuals, dangerous price swings would become a thing of the past. One year later, Perdue told his farm audience to “cut their costs” if they wanted to stay in business. Even the federal government sometimes needed to be reminded that it should not waste time and energy on the country’s failing farmers. The editors of Successful Farming, in a special business dispatch sent to various companies, surmised that President Johnson would eventually decrease his support for farm price support programs. This would ultimately help commercial farmers earn more profit by winnowing out rural deadweight. The editors celebrated, “Perhaps most important of all, Washington may at long last be about to concede that it is unable to effectively raise the incomes of inefficient farmers by holding a rein on efficient farmers.”

Competition was the gasoline on the fire of progress. Farmers as competitive entrepreneurs would create a well-organized and profitable system for the benefit of all involved.

While it is difficult to know how exactly farmers reacted to this promotion of competition, there are a few clues that hint at a mixture of both acceptance and reluctance. Certainly some members of the rural community wholly embraced this notion, including other businesses, newspapers, and especially large farmers.

A.E. Haller, owner of an agricultural construction business in Wisconsin, declared:

I recalled then, the many complaints I have heard over the years from farmers, such as

'the fertilizer didn't give me the increase I expected,' 'the new seed corn brand didn't yield

289 Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, December 29, 1959, 1-2, Box 8, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
like I was told, 'my new weed spray hasn't increased my yield' and many similar

EXCUSES. I am convinced now that many of these complaints are, instead, excuses for
the farmer's own bad management and faulty machinery operation.293

On a more basic level, the numbers alone proved that whatever agribusiness was selling, farmers
were definitely buying.

Yet even when agribusinesses managed to gain a measure of success in promoting new
standards of competition, they often had difficulty controlling what they unleashed on rural
people.294 For instance, as International Harvester promoted and sold large numbers of its
mechanized cotton pickers in the 1940s, the company still feared heavy competition from hand
pickers.295 A loss of profits also came from a communal sharing of machines by neighboring
farmsteads. Company documents showed that whereas large producers readily adapted to
mechanization, smaller farmers often lacked the necessary funds to do so in the 1940s and 50s.
Therefore, many southern farmers would either pool their resources to share a communal picker
or pay for another local farmer to process their fields, thereby bypassing further company
profits.296 More than nine years later, Harvester still struggled against localized economic forces.

M.J. Steitz, a company researcher for the marketing department, conceded that previous reports

293 Letter to Robert Woods from A.E. Haller, April 8, 1964, Box 9, File 1, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
294 Anderson, Industrializing the Corn Belt, 3-12. Also see Jellison, Entitled to Power, 131-181; Kline and Trevor,
“User as Agents of Technological Change,” 763-795.
295 The historic impact of cotton pickers is a divisive issue among scholars. Some scholars, such as Donald Holley,
viewed the introduction of these machines as an important step in Civil Rights development in the South, citing the
relocation of political power from the countryside to the city. More recently, Greta de Jong argued that changes to
the cotton system (including mass displacement caused by pickers) caused a restructuring of relationships in the
South. Seeking to maintain their regional power during the Black empowerment movement, white elites cast this
deliberate displacement as a natural phenomenon. This fierce opposition to redistributive economic policies and
Black empowerment foreshadowed the country’s transition from industrial to finance capitalism in the 1980s.
Donald Holley, The Second Great Emancipation: The Mechanical Cotton Picker, Black Migration, and How They
Shaped the Modern South (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000); Greta de Jong, You Can’t Eat
Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice after the Civil Rights Movement (Chapel Hill: University of North
296 J. Hamiton, “Farm Machinery Reports, Volume 1: Cotton Picker,” June 4, 1946, 1, Box 330, File 15561,
International Harvester Central File.
had failed to adequately account for continued competition from hand pickers. He noted that that, “reluctance of plantation owners to dispense with hand pickers” directly cut into Harvester’s market. Later, Steitz inferred, “mechanical pickers have never displaced hand-labor to any appreciable extent, but rather have moved into territories where labor vacuums were responsible for high wage rates.” He ended the report by optimistically maintaining that this continued resistance would fall away in time but still had an adverse impact on sales currently.

Of course, some farmers also turned this understanding of competition back on the companies themselves, using their role as consumer to leverage better prices or products. One proactive farmer decided to plant several different brands of hybrids in the same field, creating a simple but highly effective technique to analyze the right product for him. Increased farmer demand for custom blended fertilizer eventually forced Monsanto to change its distribution services altogether. In order to stay competitive in an increasing crowded market, the chemical company opened up their own franchised service centers. These centers marketed their ability to tailor chemical blends to meet the farmer’s individual needs (which would of course be analyzed by Monsanto specialists). And like other consumers unhappy with the quality of their product, many farmers had no qualms about invoking the competition's name to hammer home their displeasure. In letters to the seed house, several farmers mentioned how they would be buying from the Pioneer’s competition in the following years, naming Funk’s or DeKalb. In one particularly passive-aggressive note, a farmer casually mentioned that his neighbor was a

298 Ibid, 15.
299 Ibid, 15. It should also be noted that mechanization did eventually displace most handpickers by the late 1960s, De Jong, You Can’t Eat Freedom, 18-44.
300 Letter to Pioneer from Joe Hood, June 22, 1964, Box 9, File 62, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
301 Monsanto, “Seeding New Fields” Monsanto Magazine 45, no. 4, (October 1965), 7-11, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
salesman for DeKalb, with the implication that he could easily be swayed to their rival.\footnote{Letter to “Gentlemen” from Leonard Feuerstein, May 3, 1955, Box 1, File 25, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.} Competition and consumerism, such important elements of the modern farmer, had wrought unintended consequences. Just as these companies sought to manipulate their customers, farmers in turn could also play these businesses off each other. Like their use of technology, farmers adapted competition to fit their own needs and expectations.

**Infiltration of the Rural Community**

On a fundamental level, agribusinesses promoted competition because they wanted to change the way rural people viewed and embraced “community.” By excluding struggling farmers from local exchange networks and viewing them as inefficient rivals, agribusinesses hoped that their customers would embrace a new modern system of agriculture. Depopulation trends only helped enlarge this perception, as farmers saw more and more of their kind leave agriculture. Instead of understanding community as a proximity, a physical space made up of flesh and blood individuals, agricultural companies wanted farmers to expand their construction to include non-corporeal entities like agribusiness. To achieve this, businesses sought to integrate themselves within these established bonds of community. Focusing on farm institutions, farm journals, and civic organizations, agribusinesses expanded their presence in rural spaces.

In order to endear themselves to locals, many agribusinesses pursued a deliberate strategy that concentrated on supporting important rural institutions, including churches, schools, and children’s organizations. This including exploiting the system of information networks already set up by earlier reformers. By providing financial and material support, the companies hoped that farmers would eventually recognize their brands as an essential part of rurality. This took on many forms. Sometimes it was as simple as giving monetary contributions to help remodel the
local church (as in Pioneer’s 1954 donation to the Hagertown’s West Street Christian Church in Indiana) or fund a charitable organization (a 1955 donation to Boy’s Town in Nebraska for example).\textsuperscript{303} Other times the businesses developed their own educational materials to be sent to rural schools free of charge.\textsuperscript{304} Some companies gave away small gifts, all decorated with their logos, as prizes or parting souvenirs. Something as simple as Pioneer napkins became a tool of marketing. In a letter to their regional managers, Pioneer instructed the company men to hand out these stylized serviettes to as many groups as possible. "O.K., let's place them in the right hands, so that we can expose the name Pioneer to a number of folks. You'll be able to quickly think of several organizations that sponsor banquets and ‘cook-outs.’" Church groups--schools--fraternal organizations--4-H clubs--agricultural sororities--and service clubs represent only a few of the outlets where you will want to place a supply."\textsuperscript{305}

Targeting local community organizations and key individuals was another strategy. In one internal company memo, a Monsanto PR employee suggested that managers and their assistants should become “acquainted” with people understood to be key citizens or “molders of public opinion.” These people did not necessarily have to be wealthy but, “someone who is in a position to circulate lots of information.”\textsuperscript{306} John Eshelman, a feed producer, noted that it was desirable for corporations to have employees involved in local civic clubs.\textsuperscript{307} Frank Perdue made a point of meeting and speaking to farming and poultry groups throughout the Delmarva

\textsuperscript{304} John Deere, “Makers of Plenty: John Deere…the Man and the Company booklet,” 1962, 17, Box 551, File 08816, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{305} Letter to John Boilini, Elbert Gaugler, Glenn Karch, John Larrison from Walter Moore, March 2, 1964, Box 9, File 55, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{306} Letter to Ned Putzell from Dan Forrestal, March 31, 1953, Series 1, Box 1, File 5, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{307} “Survey on Farmer Oriented Advertising by Companies Having Wide Farmer Exposure,” sent to Frank Perdue, Don Mabe, Bob Brodey, Ralph Fries, Bynum Wood from Tracy Holder, April 16, 1969, 3, Box 29, File 293, Perdue Chicken Records.
Pioneer's district manager, O.D. Powell, went even further, becoming chairman of the Ohio Kiwanis' agricultural and conservation branch. From this position, Powell was able to shift the branch's focus away from conservation efforts and towards agricultural “progress.” In a letter to the organization's governor, Powell complained that, “Too many local Agriculture and Conservation committees consider they make a real contribution when they put a few fish in a pond and plant a number of trees.” Instead, Powell wanted to focus on the problem of falling farm income, an issue that would have a direct effect on his company’s bottom-line. By the mid-1950s, the Kiwanis began advocating for farmers to employ better management and make use of new research, both private and public. Powell also directed local committees to seek out prominent agricultural experts, including hybrid seed salesmen, to help promote such efforts. He concluded that the Kiwanis needed to endorse “wider use of farm products” and get farmers to use more advanced methods. All of these interactions with civic groups had the potential for a big payout for agricultural businesses, as they offered marketing opportunities without the stigma of corporate advertising.

Another example of agribusinesses trying to integrate themselves into the rural community was the relationship between these companies and another agricultural power player, the farm journals. As pointed out by many scholars, but especially Jon Fry in his article "Good Farming-Clear Thinking-Right Living," the agricultural press has long been an important yet incomplete part of the rural life. While certainly bought and read by rural people, the press itself was created in urban centers by non-farmers, often who only had limited connections to applied

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310 “News Article,” undated, Box 3, File 73, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
311 Letter to All Division Chairmen from O.D. Powell, April 11, 1955, 1-3, Box 3, File 73, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
agriculture. Throughout the twentieth century, the farm press became a critical venue for spreading the industrial ethos widely supported by agricultural experts at the land-grant universities and the USDA. With changes to biotechnology and mechanization, the farm journals became forums for new products offered by emerging companies. Ironically, as large agricultural companies mostly experienced economic growth during the 1940s and 50s, farm journals themselves had been in a long period of decline in general circulation. Just as farmers struggled with unfavorable commodity prices and rising operating costs, so too did their trade journals strive to fit a new type and size of audience. Depopulation caused a decline in circulation numbers. Specialization in farm operations required that once broad-range journals to increasingly focus their information. Due to these changes, these journals became more and more dependent on the advertising revenue bought by businesses. Because of their precarious position, the power dynamics between the agricultural press and its advertisers became increasingly lopsided.

Consequently, the press in many ways became another mouthpiece for agribusiness’s reframing of company importance in rural spaces and ultimately redefining community life. Journals promoted these companies as not just benign outsiders, but full members of larger but still tight-knit agricultural society. The companies were well aware of how they could use farm journals to promote this perception. An International Harvester 1970 public relations review argued that the company needed more complete coverage in farm journals. The PR team urged its dealers to prepare more area stories for trade journals and promised compensation and little corporate supervision. The department itself noted that they planned on revamping their mailing

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list and quarterly review. Mindful of the press’s unprecedented reach into distant rural places, the review ended:

We need as wide an exposure to as many publics as we can reach and I want us to develop good news stories about this Company. We need it right now. We need to get strong upstairs to get all the things we need so badly. I like to build contacts with every vehicle we can use and to buy drinks for newspaper people, and everyone should work on his contacts with the fullest of his capacities.\textsuperscript{314}

International was certainly not the only company to employ journals as Trojan horses to peddle their ideological promotions. Monsanto’s Public Relations department acknowledged that various trade and farm journals gave the company needed publicity for their promotion of inorganic fertilizer.\textsuperscript{315} Pioneer routinely asked its dealers to advertise on a more local level while the company bought up space in national and state farm journals.

But it was not just the journals that gave agribusinesses a forum to expose farmers to company rhetoric, but also different farm related events. Fairs, festivals, exhibitions, and other events were all a chance to both expose rural people to new perceptions of modern farming and to highlight company support of the community. For example, the Delmarva Chicken Festival, an annual event started after the Chicken of Tomorrow Contest in 1948, was an opportunity for Perdue and other poultry companies to promote their version of chicken farming as “progress.” The festival organizers wrote, “More than just a promotional scheme, the Festival is an opportunity for poultry dealers and others who are interested in this great industry to get together


\textsuperscript{315} Monsanto Public Relations Department, “Monthly Report” December 1958, 1-3, Series 1, Box 6, File 13, Monsanto Collection.
and talk over some of the many things that will improve the industry.”

In fact, the festival organizers argued that its promotional work (often aided by corporate sponsors) benefited the whole region. Companies outside of the chicken industry also used farm events to engage with local communities. Implement companies were quick to debut to new products at these events. Pioneer sent employees to state fairs and plowing contests across the South, Midwest, and Northeast. These events were contact points between corporations and farmers, spaces where agribusinesses could provide face to face communication about their vision of the future.

Ultimately, all of these interactions offered chances to infiltrate rural communities on multiple levels. By increasing their presence in the classroom, the town hall, the church picnic, and other local spaces, agribusinesses staged their own takeover of rural ideas and perceptions. This attempted integration blurred the lines between internal and external forces, challenging traditional notions of who belonged and who did not. Essentially, this also confused the conception of what farming was and who was involved. Were corporate entities farmers? In the end, they provided what seemed to be essential components of modern agriculture: products, expertise, and communal relationships. The final goal of the reassessment of competition within the community was to once again to reframe agribusiness as an essential part of agriculture. For all intents and purposes, agribusinesses wanted their institutions to become inseparable from farming itself.

**Farmers as Businessmen**

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One final identifiable feature agribusinesses pushed for was for farmers to see themselves as businessmen. This desire for entrepreneurship in rural spaces was hardly a new aspiration by large bureaucratic entities. Agricultural societies formed during the nineteenth century certainly encouraged the adoption of a business mindset, though it was as much to unite farmers against the growing power of railroad corporations as it was to promote more productive cultural practices.\(^{319}\) With the advent of scientific management and the emphasis on efficiency, reformers of the early twentieth century heavily endorsed its application in agriculture. Like other Progressive Era reforms, the Country Life Movement focused on bringing organization and improvement to a countryside they believed to be out of touch with a rapidly modernizing world. Unfortunately for these reformers, they often found their attempts ignored or openly resisted by the very farmers they wished to help.\(^{320}\) Other agricultural professionals too found their campaign for farm-business management did not necessarily change agricultural methods, though this did not stop groups like the Farm Bureau, Extension, or land-grant universities from continuing to push professionalization. Youth-centered organizations, allowed the state, commercial agriculturalists, and their allies a chance to plug modernization of rural life.\(^{321}\)

One question to be asked is why these companies would care about how their customers thought about themselves as long as they continued to buy their products? Obviously the state had policy and diplomatic reasons (national and international food security, basic economic stability, etc.) to want farmers to act and think a certain way. Agricultural professionals too needed validation for their research or they faced the possibility of being left behind in the

\(^{319}\) Allan Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, Maryland: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2\(^{nd}\) edition 2011, 1963), 1-79.


\(^{321}\) Gabriel Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America*, 1-88.
professionalization rush of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Still, agricultural companies also had much to gain from the adoption of a business mindset. These agribusinesses saw traditional farming as fundamentally flawed and farmers as irrational actors. Agriculture, when viewed as a lifestyle, failed because it resisted modern applications of industrialism, efficiency, and consumerism. Agricultural economists remarked that traditional agriculture had failed because of its inability to coordinate with the market. Pioneer promised in one alfalfa booklet not to dwell on “how poorly the average farmer is doing.” Monsanto celebrated the wheat farmers of Sonora, Mexico for abandoning “traditional methods” and embracing modern business techniques and technology. This notion that agriculture was a “sick industry” that needed modernizing through business ideology challenged how farmers viewed themselves and their work. If farmers continued to identify with past stewardship, tradition, and making do, they would increasingly fall behind a rapidly advancing society.

Agribusinesses believed that reorienting customers towards a business ethos provided farmers with a chance to improve their industry. “Business” required risk and innovation. It accepted that some would fail and that this failure was fundamentally good and natural. As an ethos, it solidified connections between national companies and farmers while fully bringing agriculture under the mantle of a global economic network. Basically, it helped unchain farmers from bonds of past tradition and freed them to pursue rational answers to the problems of the agricultural system. If farmers accepted their role as businessmen, they essentially bought into

326 Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 1-74.
the very process of modern, industrial, and capitalistic agriculture. It was a system that centered on agribusiness. It depended on the industry’s products to increase agricultural production. The structure required constant professional scientific and technological developments to address issues of erosion, pollution, pest resistance, and other problems of farming. In this system, farmers depended on input and output industries to buttress their own production. The postwar period was a perfect era for agribusinesses and their allies to push for the reconstruction of farmers as businessmen. It was a time of stress and success, when many failed but some succeeded. Farms grew larger as farming families grew smaller. Production increased but so did operation costs. At a crossroad, agriculture faced questions about its qualities and beliefs, about what it meant to be a farmer. This business ethos, along with consumerism and competition, was just another pillar to uphold agribusinesses’ vision of modern agriculture.

In order to focus on the importance of business acumen in farming, agricultural corporations often highlighted the difference between farming as a lifestyle and farming as a capitalist enterprise. They did so by comparing the past to the present. When they discussed their own history, these companies often played on romanticized images of the past. One Rath advertisement, showing a small town butcher and family, highlighting the past with the headline, “Old Fashioned Values: It’s an American Tradition.” John Deere reminisced that the agricultural frontier allowed every man the chance to work on his own. Monsanto recalled that farmers in the past would listen to the wisdom of their elders during planting time. The chemical giant maintained there was a "leisurely, friendly" way to run a farm in those simple days.

328 John Deere, "Makers of Plenty: John Deere…the Man and the Company booklet,” 1962, 7, Box 551, File 08816, International Harvester Central File.
329 Monsanto, “Seeding New Fields: Monsanto's MAC program bridges the gap between laboratory and farm,” Monsanto Magazine 45, no. 4, (October 1965): 7, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
Allis-Chalmers in particular utilized a Norman Rockwell-eque campaign to promote its tractors and other equipment. Quaint villages, small-town Americana, virtue, independence, and traditional values were all prominent themes that agribusinesses presented. They did this for a number of reasons.

First, this romanticized version of agriculture made for excellent marketing material. Scholar Roland Marchand has shown that advertisements, though they do not reflect reality, do echo attitudes, values, and broader assumptions of society. Advertisements, Marchand noted, are "zerrspiegel, a distorting mirror that would enhance certain images." Advertisers deliberately chose to develop certain images because they believed it would move products, not because they were truthful or showcased real life. Images and symbols that reinforced patterns of consumerism and capitalism were therefore highly prized, as they would hopefully lead to more acceptance and fewer questions about the nature of the system. For companies looking to encourage agricultural consumption, the mythical and virtuous yeoman of the past was an ideal symbol to employ because of the social capital it already had with rural and urban Americans alike. For their part, rural people had long leveraged their own virtue to demand political and economic changes in their favor. From the Populists to the Farm Bureau, rural organizations played up their role as democratic institutions to achieve their goals.

The more important reason why agribusinesses presented an idealized version of the past was to juxtapose it with current reality. The past was idyllic, companies argued, but the present required a different kind of farmer, one that saw agriculture with the keen eye of a businessman. New economic and environmental problems made the farming of the past an unrealistic notion in

331 Ibid, i-xxi.
the present. Instead of seeing farming as a lifestyle, farmers needed to approach it as a business operation, utilizing all the management skills and new technologies that would increase their overall production. Monsanto argued that since the end of the Second World War, farming had become increasingly technical, requiring farmers to acquire new abilities and management techniques. Farmers were, the chemical company maintained, no different than their “big city” business counterparts. In a 1965 article one featured farmer remarked, “The whole apparatus of modern American business methods must become a part of farming. The farmers of the future must no longer be willing to pay for a way of life, as they did in the past, when they settled for subsistence farming just so their families could live in the country.” Implement supplier John Deere reaffirmed this notion, remarking that, “Today, users of Deere equipment are businessmen…including the farmer. He is a businessman in every sense of the word, who struggles with the same problems of management, purchasing, production, and marketing as any other businessman.” The editors at Prairie Farmer even observed that competition and depopulation served as an example of why farmers needed to change their mindset towards business management.

The squeeze has done farming a lot of good. It has been hard to take and sometimes hard to understand, because we persist in looking at farming as a way of life. All kinds of things have been tried to avoid the realities of today’s farm productivity. In spite of a long

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332 Monsanto, “Seeding New Fields: Monsanto’s MAC program bridges the gap between laboratory and farm,” Monsanto Magazine 45, no. 4, (October 1965): 7, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection
333 Monsanto, “Are These the “New” Farmers?: Sketches of five outstanding corn growers help answer the question,” Monsanto Magazine 48, no. 1, (1968), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
succession of protective and adjusive government programs, change has been taking place, steady, inexorably, until farming has been converted into a business.³³⁵

Farming as a lifestyle might have worked in the glorious past, but those days were gone. In their place, agribusinesses urged a new way of understanding, that of the businessman.

Sometimes promotion of business acumen was shown via the professional relationship between farmers and companies, as in the case of contracted seed dealers and poultry growers. Pioneer was especially keen on crafting a more professional dealership base. Standardization, both in company work and conceptions of agriculture, was the key to making this marketing tactic work. Pioneer needed its dealers to see themselves not just as farmers, but as businessmen. In a letter to its regional managers, the company commented that they needed to upgrade their sales force. Increasing their sales numbers would only be possible if dealers adopted, “a professional or business-like approach to the sales.”³³⁶ Pioneer, like Extension and the Farm Bureau before them, worried that most farmers failed to appreciate the importance of business in modern farming operations. In fact, Pioneer often partnered with other businesses to reinforce this belief. In 1958, Pioneer joined with the Greater Des Moines Chamber of Commerce to invite many of their dealers and customers to the annual “farm-business day.” Pioneer publicized that the “Purpose of the day is to acquaint our neighboring farm people with facts about the operation of business and industry. It is hoped that the day will promote better understanding by farm business men and their wives of how our businesses are operated, what our economic and social problems are, and why we need to work together.”³³⁷ The subtext assumed that farmers needed professional knowledge of how to run their farms with a business-like efficiency and more

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³³⁶ Letter to District Sales Managers, May 27, 1964, Box 10, File 5, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
³³⁷ Letter Grover Hahn to Nelson Urban, October 22, 1959, Box 1, File 1, Pioneer International Records.
production, a business model that directly benefited Pioneer. But it also posited that agribusinesses were the holders of that knowledge and it was only through cooperation that farmers would be successful.

Pioneer’s attempts to professionalize dealers were not simply to avoid problems on the farm, but to demonstrate a philosophy that could easily be translated to other rural community members. The company openly encouraged its dealers not just to sell their products, but also to keep other farmers abreast of new information and techniques. In a celebratory letter sent out to salesmen, the seed house praised the dealers for their work in spreading professional knowledge to their customers and neighbors: “We know of course, that you salesmen made a real contribution to this growth--by encouraging the farmer to buy the varieties best adapted to his soils and his use, and by encouraging him to use the best cultural practices.”338 This was also evident in the company’s monthly journal, *Pioneer Kernels.* An odd brew of company propaganda, agricultural advice, and salesmen’s gossip, *Kernels* was a one-stop shop for Pioneer news. It played a critical role in persuading dealers to become both salesmen of seed and marketers of the agribusiness promotion. One article in the fall of 1955 insisted that farmers and salesmen were not all that different from one another. Just like farmers, local salesmen cultivated a “territory,” minding their fences and acting quickly to kill any “weeds” that threatened their “crop.” And as those who worked the field, salesmen also understood the importance of crop rotation when their plants or plans refused to stand.339 By blurring the lines between farming and business identity, Pioneer hoped their dealers would provide free and persuasive advertising to their kin, neighbors, and other locals.

339 *Pioneer Kernels,* September, 1955, 2, Box 2, File 26, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
But while some relationships pushed farmers towards professionalization, agribusinesses across America pressed others to adopt a more business-minded orientation by celebrating efficiency, large-scale industrialism, and scientific management. This emphasis had a long history in agricultural reform. Coined the “industrial ideal” by historian Deborah Fitzgerald, agricultural academics, government employees, Farm Bureau brass, and businessmen in the early twentieth century celebrated this ideology and believed it to be the future of American agriculture. Despite numerous setbacks, including the failure of model farms and unfavorable economic conditions, this ideal persisted and found fertile ground among agribusiness employees. These corporations believed that modern farming was a business, one that had a long and treasured history, but ultimately it was just that, a business that provided goods and services to those who paid them. To ensure that more farmers embraced business as a necessary component of modern farming, these entities touted “improved cultural practices” as a catch-all for greater efficiency, use of new technology, and overall implementation of a managerial style in agriculture.

Understandably, advancements in scientific technology were an important part of this business-minded attitude. Just as a factory owner looked to new technology to upgrade their operation, so too should farmers look to improve their production methods through new products. When describing the “new modern farmer,” Monsanto affirmed, “He uses all the modern apparatus available to him: computer for accounts and farming planning, spectrographic leaf analysis, chemical weed control programs, hybrid seeds.” International Harvester illustrated a similar understanding of modern agriculture when describing farmers who use

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340 Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 1-32.
341 Monsanto, “Are These the “New” Farmers?: Sketches of five outstanding corn growers help answer the question,” *Monsanto Magazine* 48, No. 1, (1968), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
automated cotton pickers, “By using mechanized equipment and planting to a stand on his best cotton acreage, the modern cotton producer plans his yield, computes his forthcoming costs, and budgets his resources for the finest stand of cotton he can possibly produce.” In adopting new scientific advancements like implements, herbicides, hybrids, and others, “the growing process has become a modern production line and the land has become a machine-equipped factory.”

In the end, the line between technological adoption and business mentality was one that agribusinesses very much wanted to draw. It obviously required products they produced. Secondly, it further integrated agribusinesses into rural spaces through their role as experts and holders of important knowledge.

Outside of technology, companies also focused on the need for better farm management. They stressed efficiency, specialization, and standardization as the keys to transitioning the agricultural process from a lifestyle to a business. Farmers, these companies believed, needed help learning how to properly handle a modern operation that required skills in managing overhead, dealing with technical issues, and balancing labor and time costs. For all the skill they possessed, these companies and their allies believed that many farmers would struggle. Paul Philips, Chairman of the Delmarva Growers Committee, put it bluntly when he suggested in 1965, “Most of the farmers and small business operators are in need of more management education.” The simple habit of keeping a daily record and balance sheet was a major push for companies and other organizations desiring better managerial oversight. International Harvester even offered its customers a farm record booklet, urging farmers to track their long term profit.

343 Of course, despite agribusinesses desire to lead farmers as technological experts, they often found their instructions (and sometimes their very ideas) ignored by their customers. In reality, companies had very little control over how their customers used their products. J.L. Anderson, Industrializing the Corn Belt, 3-104.
and to strictly separate household expenses from the farming operation. By following their helpful tips, the implement dealer stated, farmers could easily sharpen their farm’s management. Not only did these businesses believe that farmers needed to become businessmen, but also that it was the duty of agribusiness to lead and educate their customers in this transformation. Monsanto claimed that their chemists and crop specialists were fundamental in helping farmers implement business-like methods and techniques. For example, when it came to a specific crop (sugar beets), the company led the charge to educate their customers, noting that, “Growers are being shown new and better cultural practices--are urged to follow.” To effectively reach a wider audience, the company hired Earl Spurrier, a former county agent, farm manager, and agricultural professor, in a purely advisory role. Through a series of meetings and seminars, Spurrier would “help communicate the crop production information evolving from Monsanto's agricultural research and development efforts.” Pioneer and International Harvester also used employees to advocate for a more business-minded approach to farming. Both sent dealers booklets detailing how to boost sales but also describing new, more effective management skills for their own farm. The seed house also produced a number of different scientific management publications. Targeting “more than your average farmer,” these articles issued new information about insect control, fertilization efforts, and corn planter capabilities. One typical example asked farmers to “calenderize their harvest.” Though this may seem like a simple catchy slogan meant to attract customers, Pioneer’s words had a deeper meaning. By

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345 International Harvester, “Farm Business Record,” circa 1940s, Box 523, File 4504, International Harvester Central File.  
346 Monsanto, “Seeding New Fields: Monsanto’s MAC program bridges the gap between laboratory and farm,” Monsanto Magazine 45, no. 4, (October 1965): 7-11, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.  
347 Monsanto Public Relations Department, “News Release,” January 26, 1965, 1-2, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.  
inviting farmers to calenderize, (in other words, schedule their planting based on timetables, financial projections, and market analysis) rather than custom or situation, agribusinesses projected to farmers one of the main elements of industrial capitalism, control of the means of production. Like a factory owner, control over time and space would allow for greater efficiency and therefore greater profits for farmers willing to take up the mantel of businessman. Everything, when pursued by professional farmers, could become governable to some extent. Chemicals, machines, and biotechnology could and would bend nature to the will of man. Or as one Pioneer employee said, all “items are controllable by you except for the weather.”

Thinking like an entrepreneur would unlock new solutions to old agricultural problems, allowing the well-informed farmer to conquer even the most challenging of environments.

Of course, it was not simply though their publications that agribusinesses advocated business management on the farm. These companies also took a hands-on approach through educational outreach in rural communities. Often this meant sponsoring lectures and seminars by university trained specialists. Monsanto funded several traveling exhibits, including an “Agricultural Field Profit Analysis Display.” International Harvester produced many small films featuring both their products at work and how to skillfully utilize efficient business methods. Companies like Rath, Pioneer, and Perdue, sponsored youth contests and other events to teach farm kids the value of a business mindset in agriculture. Perdue touted that its Breeders Program helped teenagers get a jump start in a competitive industry. Pioneer requested that vocational agriculture students involved in their contests plant two other corn varieties to

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351 Monsanto Advertising and Market Development Department, “Internal Memo,” December 1967, Series 1, Box 1, File 3, Monsanto Collection.
showcase the competitive advantage of Pioneer seed. In one of the most bizarre attempts to teach management skills, International Harvester even created its own board game uninspiringly called, “Farm Management.” Sold in their parts catalog, the company touted that the game would be fun and teach valuable skills, “Here's a brand new game for old and young. It's educational, practical, and entertaining. Up to six people can play, competing against each other to see who is the best farm manager… who can make the most profit.” Though soon pulled from distribution, no doubt because of lack of sales, the game still had its fans among agricultural experts. Frank Lanham, a professor of Agricultural Engineering at the University of Illinois, praised the game for its possible application in the classroom and recommended that it, “should serve as a device for promoting interest in farm management in high school and possibly in beginning college courses.” Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately for board game enthusiasts everywhere), the International Harvester game soon disappeared from the company’s business management strategy.

Another important aspect of agribusinesses’ educational outreach was the use of demonstration farms. These physical spaces represented abundant opportunities to expose farmers, even non-customers, to multiple characteristics of modern farming. Demonstration farms allowed input and output industries a chance to spotlight their products in the best light, displaying their advantages on a local level. Rath’s swine demonstration was critical to showing

354 “Fall Festival of Rath Deluxe Beef Advertisement,” Holyoke Transcript Telegram, September 22, 1965, Series 1, Box 1, File 2, Rath Packing Company Records.
farmers important developments in hog technology.\textsuperscript{357} Pioneer and other seed houses often encouraged salesmen to use their own fields as demonstration plots. These corporations also asked dealers to bring potential clients to “field days” at demonstration plots directly sponsored by the company.\textsuperscript{358} For instance, the ever ambitious AJ Custer expanded his relationship with Pioneer by opening his fields (complete with company supplied fertilizer and seed) as demonstration plots.\textsuperscript{359} International Harvester hosted its own company farm in Ottawa, Illinois, believing it served as a strong stage for communicating new product information.\textsuperscript{360} The implement dealer even created a life size replica of a fully mechanized “modern” farm for the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry.\textsuperscript{361} Monsanto, though late to the party, quickly created their own string of demonstration farms in the 1960s. Realizing the potential revenue to be gained by agricultural chemicals, Monsanto’s marketing plan employed these farms as strong displays of chemical power. In 1965, the company’s annual report touted the demonstration farms.

Marketing efforts were supported by innovative programs to merchandise Monsanto's agricultural know-how to growers. Farm tours, informational meetings and strategically placed demonstration fields helped illustrate the effectiveness and profitability of the company's techniques and products. Proven scientific methods--spectographic analysis of plant tissue, for example--were used to determine the precise nutritional needs of customers' crops.\textsuperscript{362}
Just one year later, the company bragged that close to thirty thousand farmers had visited their series of twenty-two demonstration farms.\textsuperscript{363}

In order to make these demonstration farms so effective, agribusiness often used the latest products from other industries. This was an important point of the corporate interaction. Theoretically speaking, companies across industry lines should have had very little communication. After all, there would be no real reason for Monsanto to engage with Perdue Chicken, or for John Deere to intermingle with DuPont or Hormel with more than a surface acknowledgement. In reality, however, these companies (even sometimes direct rivals) often connected to create loose alliances. Sometimes these were unconscious efforts for the sake of their own product. For example, Pioneer requested that their seed growers or demonstration farmers use chemicals on their fields.\textsuperscript{364} The corporation knew that hybrids actually needed fertilizer in order achieve the maximum yields advertised by the company.\textsuperscript{365} Therefore, Pioneer often advocated the heavy use of commercial nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus fertilizer within their own advertisements, pamphlets, and letters. Other times companies worked together directly toward a mutual goal. The Delmarva Poultry Industry connected with both retail stores and the chemical feed industry to sponsor and support the “Chicken of Tomorrow” contest and the Delmarva Chicken Festival.\textsuperscript{366} Obviously these companies had much to gain from working together rather than apart.

Despite their different products, they all had the same goal: to create and sustain a new identity of modern agriculture. These companies also believed in a similar ideology; that they as

\textsuperscript{363} Monsanto, \textit{Annual Report}, 1966, 8, Series 8, Box 4, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{364} Letter to Pioneer Grower from John Airy, May 19, 1955, Box 1, File 98, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{365} Anderson, \textit{Industrializing the Corn Belt}, 54-60.
\textsuperscript{366} Monsanto, “Chicken is something but a bird!: thanks to modern farmers, scientists and industry,” \textit{Monsanto Magazine} 40, no. 4, 30 (October 1960), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection; Delmarva Poultry Industry, “King Chicken,” \textit{Sussex Countain}, Spring/Summer 1948, Box 1, File 1, Delmarva Poultry Industry Inc. Records.
agribusinesses were essential to the process. In fact, the more deeply ingrained these corporations became to agriculture, the more they depended on one another. What was the point of a mechanical cotton picker if the crop could not be modified to fit the spindles? How would swine farmers be able to meet the demands of meat packers without confinement barns or antibiotics? As sales manager Wayne Skidmore noted, “We've been cooperating with many fertilizer, chemical, and machinery companies for several years in evaluating new products. They like to work with us because we can usually try out their new ideas on large acreages operated by good farmers…our seed growers.” Like Pioneer, other input industries had much to gain from encouraging dealers and their customers to adopt industrial farming practices.

This corporate impulse towards professional agriculture fit nicely with other compartmentalized aspects of this new farming identity. Clearly farmers as businessmen would have to consume greater and greater numbers of agribusiness products and information. The move from “doing without” to “productive consumption” signaled the dramatic entrance of farmers into the ideology of the middle class, taking on many of the characteristics that symbolized a new socio-economic status. The celebration of competition and the subsequent dismissal of cooperation within rural communities also matched closely with this business philosophy. Competition, after all, was at the heart of capitalistic development. Those that failed to adopt these standards or to see agriculture for what it was, a business, would eventually be forced out. The connection between business, competition, and success also took on gendered consequences. Men of the middle class retained and performed their gendered identity by succeeding in business and hence allowing their families to consume material goods. Success in

367 Letter to Salesmen from Wayne Skidmore, March, 1960, 1, Box 8, File 80, Pioneer Eastern Division Records; “Calendarize” Your Corn Harvester,” Pioneer Bulletin 1, 1960, 1-4, Box 8, File 80, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
competition showcased their masculinity. Maintenance and control of the land and everything upon it (including family members) was the symbol of masculinity, a responsibility and right. Consequently, men who “failed” to adjust were not truly men. They had failed to perform the necessary characteristics that denoted their gendered difference.

These two themes, competition and business, intertwined to place agribusiness at the center of farming itself. Companies existed as providers of wealth, as community members, and as experts. In fact, modern farming would be impossible without these companies. This point was the key pillar upon which agribusinesses rested their considerable weight. As Deborah Fitzgerald noted, when a farmer brought a tractor in the early twentieth century, “he tacitly adopted a whole host of other practices and entered into a new set of relationships.” So too did farmers who embraced these features of identity ultimately accept the growing presence of these agribusinesses in rural life. Yet, more to the point, these traits and their consequences for agrarian society were to make what was once diverse, standardized, what was once local, globalized, what was once fluid, regimented. Farming, as conceived by these influential entities, reduced itself to a single simplified version of what it had been, a reflection that mirrored some traits and eliminated others.

At the heart of the matter was legibility. Like governmental states before them, agricultural companies confronted a confusing mess of diversity across agricultural landscapes, one that no guidebook could easily translate. Therefore, codifying what exactly was a farmer took on all the more importance. It helped make sense of not just who their customer base was, but what their customers should be. Though designed to make rural environments and people knowable to outside institutions, it was more about how they planned to use this new

368 Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 5.
identification. It is here that we get to the core of this new identity and why these businesses poured such immense amount of time and energy into it. Manipulation can be made easier when watered down to an easily digestible bite. These traits need agribusiness, its products, its expertise, and its rhetoric to operate. The quest to essentialize an already functional system started here.

What was the consequence of these actions? Agrarian life was and is still full of complexity. Practical farming depends immensely on uncontrollable factors and local situations that defy standard solutions. And yet, so often when it is portrayed, the image presented is very much like the *zerrspiegel*, a mirror that hides many realities to display a single distorted impression. It is not just that most Americans do not farm anymore, but that they have absolutely no understanding of the modern food system at all. This reflection is all there is to see. For rural communities centered on agriculture, the mirror also holds its own consequences. One outcome of this push was the consolidation of many different types and forms of agricultural identity to a single, simplified version favored by business interests and their allies. The mixture of the farmer as a broad scale consumer, competitor, and businessman limited the very type of person who could possible be conceived of as a farmer. Agribusinesses and their rhetoric ideologically separated non-white, non-male, small-scale, and a whole host of other Americans from agriculture.

However, it was not just individual farmers who felt the weight of these campaigns, but the rural community as well. The conception of cooperation and independence was turned on its head. Farmers, though initially dependent on local networks to sustain themselves, found their operations becoming independent from their neighbors with the adoption of new technologies and new practices that made communal exchanges increasingly obsolete. Whereas local
economic bonds became more and more frayed, the tie between corporate agribusiness and farmers only grew stronger and more one-sided. Farmers, whose blend of adaptation and resistance to outside forces once made them so infuriating, discovered themselves more and more dependent on external entities for their farms’ sustenance. The sense of community grew larger as more farm families disappeared from the countryside.

This strange duality, a complex reality underneath the simplified mirrored reflection, was the root of agribusinesses’ various marketing schemes in the postwar period. It characterized their peculiar relationship with the past and the present, allowing them to romanticize what was while selling what should be. It helped corporations infuse agriculture with traits they deemed worthy and discard others that stood in their way. Finally, agribusinesses used this contrast to illustrate their own control over science and technology. Despite their use of agrarian mythology, agribusinesses celebrated technological determinism and high modernism. We have already looked at how these entities attempted to simplify and recraft the identity of farmers. Now we will see how agribusiness used conceptions of science and technology to reinforce their belief in the triumph of scientific thought, to remake the agricultural process itself, to master the landscape and its people, and to codify its own expertise and core beliefs in the superiority of its methods. All of this was done to essentialize their system and their place in agriculture.
 CHAPTER FIVE: IMAGINED HEARTLAND: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN AN AGRIBUSINESS MODEL

In 1970, National Geographic sent a reporter to observe what they deemed the “revolution” down on the farm. Crisscrossing his way across the country, journalist Jules B. Billard witnessed a plethora of scientific innovations that altered the countryside in a shocking fashion. Billard marveled at changes to plant biology, admired the seemingly endless application of mechanical and chemical technology, and enthusiastically greeted the possibility of factory-like precision and efficiency in the agricultural industry. He ended his article with speculation; this revolution was only just beginning, no doubt promising a world of plenty for those bold enough to take it. Underlining Billard’s interviews and research was an invisible but essential assumption; all of these changes were good. The article associated scientific advancement with organic human progress and assumed that this progress would solve innate problems often associated with agriculture. Billard displayed the issues of agriculture’s past (poverty, famine, and drudgery) as matters now conquered by a committed force of scientists, engineers, and progressive farmers. Farm wives, who once possessed, “ill-moded attire and drudgery –hardened hands,” now were as likely to own a mini-skirt and television as their city-sisters. Their husbands now enjoyed the fruits of a college education. They were aided by a dedicated network of scientific experts, whose mission was to increase profit and decrease the sweat equity needed to earn a decent income in farming. The possibilities seemed endless to Billard, who wondered about the consequences of this transformation, writing “My mind churned with the implications of such developments building on the progress of the past.”

What Billard described very much echoed the beliefs of one of the main drivers of this transformation, agribusinesses. For companies involved in the agricultural industry, the advancement of science and technology was at the heart of their own personal revolution. Widespread adoption of new technology swelled company coffers and prompted massive growth. Moreover, this extensive application of their products validated agribusinesses’ own positive association between scientific development and problem solving. After all, it was their inquiry and experimentation that provided solutions to agricultural conundrums. For instance, the tomato plant (along with many others) could now be harvested in an efficient and clean manner, leading to greater profits for the farmer and lower prices for the consumer. Pests and weeds no longer stole profits from the hapless grower. Chemicals and hybrids multiplied yields. Environments that once stymied growers now burst with cultivated life. A world free of hunger and famine seemed like a real possibility. Of course, both Billard and agribusinesses took for granted the power of science and technology to solve all of these problems. They blindly followed this ideology and often ignored the costs of their venture.\(^{370}\)

The relationship between science and technology and agribusiness had two specific applications, as both a philosophy and a tool. On a fundamental level, faith in scientific development was part of agribusiness’ own internal ideological formation. Within their very construction, unquestioned faith in science and technology shaped these companies and their vision of themselves, their future, and the future of agriculture. The cross-pollination between academic scientists, reformers, and businessmen formed the foundation of these corporations. After the Second World War, this ideology continued to form the basis of the industry, with businesses dependent on the possibility of scientific solutions as the answer to questions in the

\(^{370}\) Ibid, 147-185.
physical and ideological realm. Agribusinesses sought to create and fully control scientific development, placing themselves at the center of a system that needed continuous advancement to exist. But as they attempted to harness it, this singular focus on a specific application of science and technology also manipulated corporate actions and perceptions. It narrowed larger agricultural possibilities while opening new scientific avenues of inquiry.

Along with its ideological influence, confidence in science and technology became a tool for these businesses to wield in their quest to essentialize themselves to the agricultural process. Agribusinesses employed this confidence for a dual purpose, as both the basis for physical solutions to agricultural problems and as an ideological ploy to convince others of corporate superiority. Companies believed that science and technology allowed for greater efficiency, which in turn would disentangle an industry from problematic tendencies of waste. It also helped support and justify their quest to conquer and control nature. Agribusinesses imagined an environment that could be wholly crafted by humans. The only way to do that was to fully engage their technological expertise in the environmental and social ordering of the landscape. The continued development of and faith in science and technology highlighted agribusinesses’ own expansion of private rather than public authority. While these businesses worked heavily with public institutions, they also sought to commodify the very knowledge that these entities (the USDA, Extension, land-grants, etc.) supposedly held for the public at large. Instead, agribusiness desired the constriction of this information to private sources, namely themselves. These companies could then merchandise this information, continuing to create their own layer of expertise and relegate public knowledge to the realm of private markets.

In the end, the connection between agribusiness and science in the postwar period was a product of the legacy of high modernism. Defined by James Scott in his influential work Seeing
Like A State, high modernist ideology was a, “muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws.” Though agribusiness did not possess the sweeping power of a tyrannical government, it nevertheless held a similar vision of scientific purpose in society. Both believed, almost blindly, in the ability of scientific development to solve ingrained societal problems, including those of agriculture. Agribusinesses also retained a comparable number of high modernist supplicants within their corporate ranks, as engineers, technicians, and agricultural scientists held sway over company expansion.

The growth of this ideology stemmed directly from the emergence of the agricultural sciences in the middle to late nineteenth century. As Charles Rosenberg showed in his seminal work No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought, science ascended to a place of authority during this time. As a conception, it was used to underwrite social conventions and explain an increasingly industrialized, modern world. Given the social capital of farming in the nation’s rhetoric (as well as the political power of the farm bloc), the agricultural sciences were the first to receive widespread backing from state bodies. While these sciences would create and sustain a critical part of the modern agricultural industry, their technocrats also shaped the basic interpretation of the role of science in society. One aspect of this was an unquestioned faith in the virtue of progress. Scholar Alan Marcus also discussed the expansion of agricultural science. Focusing on the period between 1870 and the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887, Marcus

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examined the battle between systematic and scientific farming over the future of agriculture. After a period of intense rivalry, agricultural scientists eventually emerged victorious.\(^ {373}\)

Faith in progress also permeated the widening web of expertise woven between reformers, scientists, bureaucrats, and emerging agricultural companies in the early twentieth century. Desires to improve efficiency and further standardize society were a hallmark of the Progressive movement, a wave of reforms that also sought to regularize and modernize rural life. Many key players, including those who would deeply influence developing agribusinesses, were part of these efforts.\(^ {374}\) These reformers were also vital to solidifying the ascendance of the “industrial ideal.” This approach focused on industrializing agriculture, believing that modernization was the answer to solving agricultural problems. It thusly emphasized principles of “efficiency” and directed farmers to adopt new management styles, specialization, mechanization, and other facets of large-scale industrial production. This ideal naturally depended on scientific innovations and the belief that their application signaled progress.\(^ {375}\)

The period from mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth was a particularly active time for technocrats the world over. Even as reformers in America were attempting reshape the human order to fit a rational pattern, so too were government officials in Europe, Asia, and Africa struggling to do the same. With an intense focus on organization and legibility, bureaucrats (both externally and internally) employed a specific vision of scientific development that often justified their own authority and action. Timothy Mitchell’s discussion of the

\(^ {373}\) By the late nineteenth century, agricultural scientists were to separate the conception of agricultural “science” from agricultural “practice.” While many farmers distrusted science as a legitimate source of agricultural knowledge, scientists were able to eventually overcome this perception, thus securing their own professional authority. Alan Marcus, *Agricultural Science and the Quest for Legitimacy: Farmers, Agricultural Colleges, and Experiment Stations, 1870-1890* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1985), 1-58.


relationship between European imperialism, conceptions of modernization, and the history of Egypt revealed the stark reality of the influence and hold “western ideas of progress” in the postcolonial era. Yet, this undertaking did not come without resistance from their test subjects. Obviously, people the world over were not merely vessels for bureaucratic efforts. Much to the frustration of these bureaucrats, they struggled against attempts to change their lifestyles. Two of James Scott’s books, Weapons of the Weak and The Art of Not Being Governed, focus on the interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed (often the imperialist and their subjects), speculating that resistance takes on a more subtle form than open rebellion. Instead, everyday resistance included non-compliance, especially when it came to issues of greater legibility.

While American farmers certainly held greater societal power than peasants beset by hostile foreign invaders, they displayed a similar form of resistance. Sometimes farmers flat out refused to adopt prescribed changes because of their ambiguous nature and unclear benefits. Other times, farmers disliked external attempts to “fix” something that they did not believe to be broken. Many were suspicious of urban reformers’ motivations, perceiving that their reforms were an excuse to bring agriculture under the larger mantel of an industrial economy. In the end, these doubts proved to be remarkably correct.

Faith and Belief

It was out of this combination of professionalization, expertise, and emerging bureaucracy that agribusinesses’ own perception of the power of science and technology was

born. As they slowly expanded their operations, their relationship with science and technology also evolved. At its core, many of their assumptions came from their own historical experience. Prominent scientific developments seemed, at least on the surface, to solve issues plaguing farmers. Hybrid seeds, produced by a combination of scientists and businessmen, increased yields and allowed for greater uniformity. Mechanization, a benefit that seemed to lower labor costs, received the attention of both land-grant engineers and company technocrats. Commodities that were once expensive and time-consuming to produce became less complicated. Agribusinesses profited immensely from scientific advancements made by both public and private research. Most of the men and sometimes the women who staffed these companies spent their formative years learning from agricultural scientists in the land grant system. It was a relationship that would have a profound effect on agribusiness’s perception of their role of science in society.

If early competition was the hammer that helped forge the organization of these agricultural companies, then this faith in science and technology was the very basis of their formation. It was the building material upon which all else rested. At the most basic level, these companies would not exist without the belief that science and technology can and should be implemented on a large, industrial scale. This was not Mendel cross pollinating flowers in his abbey. Agribusiness’ conception of the unquestioned abilities of science and technology was fundamentally tied to belief that scientific advancement equaled human progress, and that they should be the ones to wield this power. They understood that science should be used to order the world in a rational, efficient way. Wide scale application, not simply discovery, was the most important part of the process.
As an industry, agribusiness depended on constant research to support its growing power and continued infiltration of agriculture. Control was perhaps the crucial element. Science as an enterprise is not limited to men wearing white in a laboratory. Instead, it rests on the dual components of inquiry and experimentation. A child repeatedly trying to create the perfect paper airplane is involved as much in a scientific endeavor as a biologist cloning a sheep. This was not science for science’s sake or even their customers’ sake, but rather for the purpose of rendering these companies completely indispensable. Explorations of scientific ventures that did not further this goal were wholly rejected. Control was essential. It allowed companies to govern the avenues these scientific inquiries took and how they were applied on a practical level. It also reinforced their own authority as scientific innovators.

Seed companies were some of the first to fully worship at the altar of science. Emerging after the rediscovery of Mendel’s work and the subsequent battle between lab science and practical application in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, companies that would eventually come to dominate seed corn grew up under the mantel of scientific improvement.380 Their founders all possessed the belief that hybrids could and always would out produce single cross or open pollinated corn. This faith that their scientific research path would continue to churn out greater and greater yield potential was at the heart of company ideology after the Second World War. One advertisement reiterated Pioneer’s commitment to research potential by playing on this heritage: “Pioneer has invested nearly 50 years of time and hundreds of thousands of dollars in research…careful, skilled untiring research. Why? So that every grower of PIONEER BRAND SEED could be assured of having the finest, most productive, most profitable seed available. Human talent and money is dedicated to this end.”381 In fact, it was

380 Fitzgerald, Business of Breeding, 1-43; Marcus, Agricultural Science and the Quest for Legitimacy, 3-59.
their emphasis on research that also inspired the company’s new trademark in the mid-1960s. According to company president James Wallace, Pioneer’s infinity symbol represented, “never-ending genetic research to bring better living to American farmers who grow corn, sorghum and alfalfa. It's a fresh, new look that denotes progress, growth and quality.” Wallace noted that confidence in scientific research was part of Pioneer’s legacy as the first hybrid seed corn company (a highly debatable claim indeed). The infinity symbol therefore served as an appropriate mark of the company’s philosophy, that endless research was the foundation of their products and goals.382

The reason for such confidence in research ultimately rested on Pioneer’s belief in science’s ability to solve long term agricultural conundrums. Initially, the main challenge that hybrids “overcame” was the limit of production capabilities, especially when it came to different regions. The fertile Midwest often lend itself to seed corn, with its dense soil, abundant rainfall and waterways, and middling climate making it an ideal region for this plant type. Other areas of the country lacked such characteristics. Dry weather and thin topsoil of the Great Plains made corn difficult to grow. Rocky terrain, dense forests, and small acreage stymied farmers in the northeast and Appalachia. The South had its own problems. For one, corn had to struggle against the traditional commodities of cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar, and later poultry and hogs. Hot temperatures and a subtropical climate on the coastline made for swampy conditions. Yet, for Pioneer, all of these problems meant nothing in the face of applied science. Pioneer bragged that its hybrids overcame environmental limitations, allowing the farmer, no matter the region, the

control to decide what he wanted to plant.\textsuperscript{383} The company maintained that hybrids expanded the yield potential for all farms, which in turn would produce greater profits for the farmer. Roswell Garst commented that his company’s hybrids met the goal, “of the every corn raiser-more profit per bushel, more bushels per acre.”\textsuperscript{384} More bushels and more profit, even in the face of environmental impediments, showed the power that Pioneer’s hybrids possessed. A radio advertisement for their hybrid seed insisted that, “Pioneer corn was the farmer’s corn.” Its abundance allowed farmers to feed it to their livestock, leverage it against a government loan, or sell it on the market for big profit.\textsuperscript{385} Whatever the issue, hybrids were created to meet the challenge head on.

However, regional issues were hardly the only problem Pioneer’s hybrids seemed to overcome. The seed house often bragged that its scientifically developed hybrids were hardier and more resilient against different environmental stresses than competitors. Varying water levels and soil types could all be met by specific strains of hybrids. Pests were another prominent issue that seed corporations believed could be surmounted by specialized hybrid seed. Infestations of the European corn borer in the mid-1950s prompted Pioneer to try to develop resistant hybrids with the help of Iowa State University.\textsuperscript{386} Nearly a decade later, chemical resistant rootworm ravished the corn fields of Midwest, motivating the company to create a more resilient crop. In the meantime, Pioneer sent out hundreds of free bulletins on the subject, claiming, “While the state colleges have all published bulletins on resistant rootworms, none


\textsuperscript{384} Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, March 1960, Box 8, File 79, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

\textsuperscript{385} Pioneer, “As a pioneer dealer been around to see you yet? Radio Advertisement,” Beginning September 5, 1955, on “Farm Hour,” \textit{WCTW station}, New Castle IN, Box 2, File 52, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

\textsuperscript{386} Letter to Pioneer Grower from John Airy, May 19, 1955, Box 1, File 98, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
have fitted this new problem into an over-all soil insect control program as does Bulletin 8-A.”

This brash statement centered on who controlled the problem-solving scientific process. While seed houses might work with universities (which they certainly did), it was important for them to distinguish themselves as the entities driving this partnership. It was the company, not the university, which overcame agricultural problems. Farmers should have faith in company use and control of science.

Another characteristic the company advertised was hybrid uniformity. Pioneer specifically marketed their hybrid production of better formed ears, which they argued made for easier mechanical picking. Pioneer’s new advertising manager, William Hill, looked to capitalize on the greater use of mechanization. He proposed that the company appeal to progressive farmers by promoting their hybrids’ usefulness in picker-sheller machines. Scientific breeding allowed the company to exploit changes in agricultural production methods, showcasing how their seed corn was tailored to fit an evolving market. Hill visualized a promotion that would link the faith in scientific development with real production modifications. He wrote, “Imagine what we might create, using our illustration, if we were to use it with a caption such as "PIONEER PUTS MORE CORN ON THE COB FOR INCREASED PROFITABILITY" or simply, "THE PROFIT’S IN THE CORN - NOT THE COB." Of course, that profitability would not just flow into coffers of the local farmstead, but up the chain to the company that provided such advancements.

389 Letter to William Hill from Walter Moore, February 24, 1964, 2, Box 9, File 38, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
Perhaps the most blatant symbol of the company’s overwhelming optimism about the power of science was their firm belief in its ability to overcome market surpluses. A puzzle that frustrated both the farmer and government bureaucrat alike, Pioneer’s discussion of the issue seemed, at first, downright bizarre. For much of the conversation (which often included negative assessment of federal programs aimed at reductions) Pioneer simply denied that surpluses actually existed. One bulletin mailed out to farmers argued that America only possessed a “prudent reserve” of corn, one that would no doubt disappear with more exports to Europe. Conversely, even when the company acknowledged their existence, surpluses simply became another obstacle for the “magic” of science to overcome. Corn, they argued, was still the basis of a growing number of products, with the implication that more were yet to come. Other times Pioneer explained that corn’s importance, combined with a growing population, made its peak production a must.

This optimism about surpluses did not necessarily mean that the company did not prepare for worsening economic conditions. A letter from Garst to Robert Woods, the head of Pioneer’s Eastern Division, noted that surpluses were going to put the company in a tight spot over the coming years and the best way to combat this was to keep customers buying. One tactic to achieve this was to use their conception of science as an all-encompassing problem-solver. Pioneer argued “The "know-how" and ingenuity characterized by Americans should challenge us to research our way out of any surplus that might be interpreted as a problem. This we can do if

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391 Letter to Salesmen from Bob Garst, February 1, 1964, Box 10, File 15f, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
we put our best minds to the task.” In the end, the reality of market surpluses made hybrid production capabilities less of a benefit and more of a potential economic calamity.

Hybrid seed houses were not alone in their interpretation of the place of science and technology within the agricultural industry. Implement manufacturers also held a similar viewpoint on the power of their scientific and technological research. International Harvester discussed how improvements in farm mechanization allowed amazing capabilities in crop production, “These machines are the result of inspired invention genius and endless research. They reflect the American creed of lightening labor and increasing efficiency through the use of better equipment. All are designed, manufactured, and sold to produce a profit for their owners.” Both production and profit followed technological advancements, as these companies alleged their scientifically created and tested implements offered better choices for farmers. For example, John Deere suggested that their, “Engineering and Research over the years have exerted every effort to give the farmer more work capacity…more efficiency of operation…greater comfort and convenience and more usable horsepower for every dollar he spends.” This was pursuit of technological development with an eye specifically on the future. Each implement, these companies believed, added to organically occurring human progress. So when Harvester claimed that its tractors were “built for tomorrow” they were not simply talking about the next day. Instead, tomorrow was a combination of beliefs built on technological determinism and its connection to private corporations. The future would be better because of

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397 International Harvester Sales Department, “Trailing Plows No. 60 and No. 70,” 2, Box 524, File 4369, International Harvester Central File.
International Harvester’s endless research into the possible applications of science and technology to human existence.

One of the hallmarks of this better future came from the implement industry’s ability to unravel the agricultural problems of the past. As with hybrids, equipment companies believed their products would increase agricultural production across the board (which it very much did). As a whole, mechanized farming could make planting and harvesting more efficient, reduce crop waste, and speed up transportation. These companies were, as John Deere explained, the “bringers of plenty.” Furthermore, these implement giants also believed that their machines made the process itself much less time consuming and labor intensive for farmers. As companies introduced new features, they argued that farmers benefited from studier equipment and increased comfort. International’s Farmall Cub tractor was a prime example of this mentality. First introduced in the late 1940s, the company declared this new machine to be the answer to many of the problems facing small producers. The Cub promised a “more profitable system of farming,” with every job becoming easier without the need for constant hand labor. As another benefit, the Cub completely did away with animal labor for even the smallest of farmers, marking a new “beginning of an era in agriculture.”

Often these machines addressed specific problems related to certain crops, especially those that resisted past attempts to ease labor intensity or speed production. Implement dealers asserted that their scientific development created solutions that unraveled long standing issues. Though the mechanization of tomato harvest may be the best documented, the transition to

399 International Harvester, “Farming with the Farmall Cub,” 1947, 10, Box 520, File 2375, International Harvester Central File.
400 Ibid, 9.
mechanized cotton harvesting was also influential. International Harvester, for instance, said this about cotton: “Every year millions of human hands have picked cotton in the same slow, tedious way that cotton was picked thousands of years ago. Man has never been able find a substitute for the ‘time-wasting, back-breaking method.’” Lucky for the “modern producer,” International’s engineers had managed to solve this agricultural enigma and fortunate growers, “will find that the eyes of the cotton world will follow their progress and success with these mechanical marvels.” It was a change that would have a deep impact not just on the agricultural production of the South, but also on the connection between the political economy and racial injustice. Other implements also seemed to solve different conundrums. Combines merged various stages of harvesting, allowing for one man to do the work of many. Sugar beet harvesters made a previously dirty and dangerous job more convenient and comfortable for those involved. Each piece of equipment added to the overall progress of agriculture, transforming a once tedious process into a modern, streamlined mode of production.

Of course, the pursuit of scientific advancement also dealt specifically with questions of control. More to the point, technological change created questions about who had control and how these companies could maintain their jurisdiction over this process. Decisions over what implements to develop and research centered directly on these questions. Internal debates within

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403 Ibid, 3.
International Harvester illustrated how companies sought to shape scientific development in a way that would reinforce their own expertise (and therefore importance) within rural spaces. Though facing surprising competition from hand pickers and community owned machines, International Harvester’s marketing research indicated that mechanized cotton pickers would eventually become a permanent part of that industry. The trend would be helped along by key allies, as university researchers and extension agents would continue to perform demonstrations and help refine cotton hybrids that worked well with machines. Alternatively, marketing research found that some implements would cut into Harvester’s hold on their expertise. Hand welders, for example, were a possible money-making item. Marketing research showed potential. Farmsteads had a number of possibilities for welder use, especially as they became more mechanized. By the mid-1940s, nearly 45% of farms possessed the electricity to power the welder and only 1% of them actually owned one. The potential seemed so high that the company’s rival, Allis-Chambers, planned on entering the market. Eventually, however, Harvester decided not to pursue this implement as a revenue stream.

Ultimately, the potential income from welders did not outweigh the potential costs. Primarily, selling personal welders would cut into the company’s role as chief mechanic for used implements in rural areas. The likelihood of communal use was too high, as instead of venturing into corporate-owned shops, farmers would instead call on one another to service their equipment. An internal company memo posited, “If a farmer purchased a welder, he would probably have neighbors calling on him for welding services. This could easily expand to the establishment of a ‘cross-roads’ service shop with its unskilled servicing of our machines,

causing unsatisfactory performance and a loss of revenue in our dealer's shop." Both loss of revenue and the possibility of poor performance were clear disadvantages to the equipment dealer. Perhaps the most damning problem was the possibility of Harvester’s loss of expertise. As holders of specialized knowledge, corporate-sponsored dealerships were essential to maintaining the equipment and reinforcing International Harvester’s place as professional bearer of technical information. Dealers were the guardians of the door between those who needed the knowledge (farmers) and the assumed creators of that knowledge (the company). Expertise was as much about control as it was actual information. If farmers could bypass corporate jurisdiction over technical problems, the assumption was that it would cut into the company’s bottom line. Controlling science and technology allowed the company to control the farmer.

The growth of both the implement and hybrid plant use in the agricultural field also helped the development of agricultural chemicals. By the end of the Second World War, the chemical industry was on the cusp of a revolutionary movement into agriculture. These companies believed that their insistence on scientific progress, both in the past and currently, faced an uphill battle with the American people. Convinced that they were dealing with serious public doubts, chemical giants believed themselves to be the vanguard of science’s place in society. Monsanto remarked in one of its company histories, “The greatest obstacles to accomplishment of the American mission have been neither pioneer hardships nor foreign enmities, but the strong doubts in American minds and hearts which rose with Science in the 19th century.”

By the late 1950s, the company still alleged that the American public demonstrated a disturbing apathy towards science. Seeking to educate the “science-shy” masses,

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408 Internal Memo from Consumer Relations Department M.J. Steitz, May 24, 1946, in “Farm Machinery Reports: Volume 1,” Box 330, File 15561, International Harvester Central File.
409 Hubert Kay, First Draft of Monsanto and the American Idea, June 1958, 4, Series 6, Box 1, File 4, Monsanto Collection
Monsanto created a science-themed television show, “designed to bring to the public the thrilling and vital story of today's scientific advances and to attack the critical shortages in scientific education and manpower.” The company argued that its show was less of a PR stunt (though it did show commercials on gas and oil additives, rubber chemicals, surfactant, and detergent raw materials) and more of an attempt to educate the masses on proper place of chemicals in society.

Chemistry, especially when controlled by company scientists, offered incredible benefits to the masses. In the hands of Monsanto’s experts, chemistry created cleaner living environments. Food became fresher and healthier with chemical additives. Homemakers benefited from less intense labor and guesswork. Agriculture also benefited from Monsanto’s chemical research. One Monsanto magazine article quoted an Illinois farmer who assigned credit for his record corn crop to “the use of modern chemicals.” Another article maintained that the company’s scientifically compounded feeds helped produce meatier and healthier livestock and poultry. This in turn allowed meat packers to meet the growing demand for their products, stimulating the poultry, cattle, and swine industries. Charles Sommer, director of the National Agricultural Chemicals Association and a Monsanto employee, pointed out that the company excursion into retail chemicals was beneficial to all farmers.

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410 Monsanto Public Relations Department, “News Release,” 1957, Series 1, Box 1, File 2, Monsanto Collection.
411 Monsanto Public Relations Department, “News Release,” 1958, Series 1, Box 1, File 2, Monsanto Collection.
412 Monsanto, “Monsanto Chemistry in Action…Advertisement,” circa late 1950s, Series 1, Box 1, File 2, Monsanto Collection.
413 Monsanto, "Your Food and Chemical Research" Number One in a series “Chemistry in the Service of Man,” May 1953, 6-13, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
By bringing our company into a direct relation with the farmer through these products we obtain a quicker and surer grasp of farm problem that may be solved chemically. This will permit us to aim our product research and development efforts more accurately at those problems, and to give farmers quicker access to new products born of these efforts.416

By the 1950s, Monsanto was fully engaged in its quest to bring chemical solutions to America’s farm lands.

Despite all the signs pointing to more chemicals in agriculture, many products developed serious problems in the application stage or long term unintended consequences. The most obvious example was dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, better known by its trade name, DDT. Employed extensively during the Second World War, DDT became the darling of chemical companies during the 1940s and 1950s. Despite earlier criticism of the product, Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring launched a level of scrutiny that eventually led to the chemical’s ban in the United States. Yet, this was hardly the first disappointment for an industry bent on agricultural success. Monsanto faced its own crisis soon after the war. In fact, one of its first ventures into agriculture ended in complete failure. Krilium, a soil conditioner, proved to be a problem not in performance but in marketing and cost. Initially, the company believed it had caught lighting in a bottle, announcing its discovery at the American Association for the Advancement of Science Conference on December 29 1951. However, despite optimistic predictions from company researchers, Krilium failed to live up to expectations. The cost alone limited the number of potential customers, and by the mid-1950s, most commercial farmers failed to adopt the new

416 Monsanto, “Monsanto Moves Closer to Farmers,” Monsanto Magazine 35, no. 3 (August-September 1955): 3, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
product. By 1956, the company abandoned soil conditioners as the solution to fertility problems, disillusioned by their misstep.\textsuperscript{417}

In spite of this early blunder, the chemical giant quickly gained entry into the emerging field of agricultural pesticides. Randox, which would later be known by its trade name Roundup, became one of Monsanto’s big sellers. Although expensive to create, the company believed that its potential for weed control would prove to be worth the price. This argument was echoed by others connected to the company: “The university experiment stations workers and farmers and potential distributors of our product were unanimous in their belief that this was a good herbicide and one that the farmer needed.”\textsuperscript{418} Randox, along with other products like the popular weed killers Ramrod, Avadex, and Wallop, helped add to Monsanto’s emerging product line. In fact, agricultural chemicals rapidly became the company’s fastest growing department throughout the 1960s. The years between 1964 and 1967 were especially profitable, with farm chemicals averaging 26\% growth each year.\textsuperscript{419} Sales in 1966 alone totaled more than 37.1 million dollars.\textsuperscript{420} The company was able to take advantage of several advantageous events. By 1964, the federal Soil Bank Program released more than 7.4 million acres of land for use. That same year, the division also reached its first million dollar contract with feed giant Ralston Purina.\textsuperscript{421} Monsanto’s MAC retails centers continued to make inroads in rural areas, selling a number of different products. In a final stoke of good luck, the Midwestern cornroot weed showed a growing resistance to their direct competitors’ (Shell and Velisol) herbicide, opening a potential

\textsuperscript{417} Ferdinand Zient, “Roots: Origin of the Monsanto Agricultural Chemical Enterprise,” presented on June 21, 1969, Series 10, Box 5, File 20, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{418} J.H. Senger, “Case History How a New Product is Marketing,” Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate, June 29 and 30 1965, 28, Series 11, Box 2, File 5, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{419} Monsanto Annual Reports, 1964-1967, 7-9, Series 8, Box 4, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{420} R.R. Rumer, “Agricultural Division Annual Report,” 1966, 2, Series 8, Box 31, File 2, Monsanto Collection.
market for the company’s product Parathion. This eventually led to several product endorsements from seven different state experiment stations. No wonder one annual report concluded, “The outlook for the farm economy continues excellent and, with the growing usage of fertilizing materials, the industry in general should prosper in 1965.”

Yet, none of this growth would have been remotely possible without Monsanto’s firm belief in the importance of scientific development for the good of the company and its clientele. The company decided to increase its focus on agricultural chemicals, securing vast funds for its Research and Development department. Monsanto bragged that its research underwent an intensive testing period, both in the laboratory and the field. Like other chemical products, Monsanto’s agricultural merchandise faced rigorous questions from government entities: “The pesticide industry is similar to the pharmaceutical industry in that disproportionate research outlays together with extensive clinical and field testing, and finally, drawn-out negotiations with the Food and Drug Administration are necessary to the development of a commercial successful product.” But more than insuring their products’ safety, this extra layer of study seemed to verify that their research was beneficial to wider society. The chemical giant also assumed that its focus on scientific advancements would not only help its clients in the fields, but also provide new market opportunities. Pushing for more scientific research was just good business, allowing researchers to open up intriguing uses for agricultural chemicals. No problem, not pests, soil erosion, or infertility, could dampen the power of applied chemistry.

If the chemical industry had only recently found itself applying its vision of science and technology to agriculture, meat packers had long sought new inventions and techniques to extend foodways nationally. Historian Roger Horowitz noted that meat’s organic features led to repeated cycles of technological innovation to lengthen the shelf life of perishable food. The evolution of meat products aligned with developing consumption practices and processing elements. For corporate packers though, science and technology were a critical part of their industry culture and business outlook. Without refrigeration—a technological development—their industry could hardly exist on a large scale. While a farm wife might preserve salt pork to ensure her family’s food security, packers were much more interested in using the science of preservation to safeguard their own place as producer. The creation of standardized cuts, new conservation technologies, and different meat products all helped fortify the role of meat packer as the primary source of this commodity. This understanding of control was also part of their overall vision of science and technology. Like agricultural input industries, meat packers believed that their scientific methods would naturally improve the human experience, both allowing farmers greater control over their livestock while also improving the freshness and quality of products for consumers. Solutions to agricultural and consumerist problems rested, they argued, in the hands of the most competent and most interested party, the meat packers.

Historically, meat packing was one of the first agricultural enterprises to industrialize on a national scale. The development of new technologies in refrigeration and transportation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries allowed for the creation of the “cold chain.” The cold chain linked the livestock to the customer through a series of commodity networks. Early members of this chain, from the rancher to the packer, utilized scientific experimentation to extend the

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possibilities of meat production. This eventually led to a near monopoly by the “Big Four” packers of Chicago (Armour, Cudahy, Wilson, and Swift). These companies forged a new conception of meat itself, severing customers from the production process. Consumers once held a greater understanding the slaughter process—the killing and butchering of a living animal—because they practiced it. Now, Americans were divorced from those actions, reducing the conception of “meat” from a complex process to a simple refrigerated package bought from a store. Livestock farmers and ranchers also added their own voice to the developing industry. These producers, both large and small, demanded that the government both protect their interests and provide scientific help to combat costly problems. USDA scientists, along with the emerging land grant professionals, sought to combat diseases and other health issues, sometimes even against the wishes of the farmers themselves.

By the Second World War, many elements of the once-monopolized industry were changing at a rapid pace, especially in terms of scientific inquiry. While changes in labor and business practices had altered the industry’s landscape, developments in biotechnology, breeding, production methods, and slaughtering techniques also redefined meat production on a national scale. Antibiotics allowed for better disease control, which in turn led to different housing methods. Feed additives and steroids made for faster growing and plumper livestock and poultry. New processing and packaging technologies deskillled the dismembering process while creating a more uniform product for the consumer. Even the basic biology of the animals

changed dramatically. For instance, experimentation in chicken breeding altered the birds. Sensing an opportunity to latch onto supermarket retail chains, various institutions pushed for the creation of a meatier, faster maturing bird. With the Chicken of Tomorrow contest, a previous diverse population of poultry breeds eventually coalesced in single genetic specimen still used by today’s producers.431

Despite both serving as meat packers, Perdue Chicken and Rath Packing Company each represented the different range of fortunes besetting the meat industry in the postwar era. Rath, a pork packer founded in 1891 and based out of Waterloo Iowa, grew fat from government contracts during the Second World War. By 1945, it was the fifth largest meat packer and possessed the most advanced packing facility in the nation. Unfortunately, the company found its sales numbers waning in the 1960s and 1970s. Partly due to falling consumer interest in pork products, Rath also dealt with souring labor issues, unstable hog production, obsolete equipment, and increased competition. The company limped along until finally closing its doors in 1985.432 Like many regional packers, Rath failed to keep pace with the technical prowess and product diversification of vertically and horizontally integrated firms, like its intra-state rival Iowa Beef Processors.

Whereas Rath struggled to compete in a new era, Perdue Chicken thrived in the postwar environment. Founded in 1920, the company experienced rapid grow in the 1950s. Aided by biological advancements in chicken breeding and new production methods like contract farming, Perdue was able to quickly vertically integrate the Delmarva region. It successfully muscled out

independent producers and took over control of the different phases of the production process. By the 1970s and 1980s, the company became a national brand and continued to expand into new commodity markets. Today it is one of the largest poultry producers in the nation, competing directly with Tyson Foods and Pilgrim’s Pride.433

Rath Packing Company and Perdue Chicken, though moving in opposite directions of success, nevertheless held a similar faith in their scientific research. Both believed that their specific control would produce a better result for both consumers and livestock producers. Part of this perception came from the idea that company research produced products that had better quality and more uniformity. In one Rath booster plan, created to break into the Atlanta market, the packer sent sampler packages to retailers asserting, “Since the high quality of Rath products is derived from the scientific feeding of pork on the finest corn, Rath has built their selling theme on finer flavor from the Land’O’Corn.”434 Twelve years later, the company was still expressing a firm belief in the scientific superiority of their product. In one New England advertisement expounded, “Rath's Iowa beef is the result of years of successful scientific development. It has a flavor--a tenderness--a texture--unmatched by beef from any other source.”435 According to Rath, tenderness, taste, flavor, and price were all made better by the application of their carefully regulated expertise.

Perdue also employed a parallel argument about its chickens. The Delmarva company often stressed the need for their contracted hatcheries, growers, and processing plants to operate in a scientific manner. A 1971 TV commercial displayed the use of automatic feeders, asking

new chicken growers to use these machines to produce bigger birds more quickly.\textsuperscript{436} By 1975, Perdue divided the growing process even further, soliciting farmers to become “end brooding” growers.\textsuperscript{437} While this division had a deskilling effect on contracted chicken farmers, its industrial efficiency made the brooding process more rational and scientific, which companies believed was better for the industry as a whole.\textsuperscript{438} The company emphasized how its controlled environment, from the chemical based feed to the mechanically regulated temperature and lighting, created a more wholesome product. A New York City radio advertisement claimed the bird’s distinctive golden tint (gained by simply adding marigolds to the chicken feed) was, “the natural color of any young chicken brought up on a scientific controlled high protein diet--it's the sign of glowing health--the most wholesome and tastiest chicken you can buy for your table and family.”\textsuperscript{439} In another letter to New York City retailers and butchers, Frank Perdue insisted that the company’s new modern processing plant, along with the chicks’ “balanced, scientifically formulated diets,” produced well-formed and healthier birds.\textsuperscript{440}

In the end, all of these companies across the agricultural spectrum held a similar confidence in their scientific processes and their own place as stewards in the quest for betterment. Their initial formation was shaped by invention and further germinated by new technological innovations. Companies saw their actions outwardly solve many problems that had plagued agriculture for years. The issues of famine, drought, pests, decomposition, excessive toil, and others seemed to fade with the application of agribusinesses’ scientific methods. And in

\textsuperscript{436} Perdue Chicken, “Chicken Raising,” TV Commercial, September 1, 1971, Box 29, File 299, Perdue Chicken Records.
\textsuperscript{439} Perdue Chicken, “Radio Commercial #4: The next time you shop for poultry,” July 1968, Box 29, File 299, Perdue Chicken Records.
\textsuperscript{440} Letter to retailers from Frank Perdue, January 8, 1971, Box 29, File 299, Perdue Chicken Records.
many ways, they were right. Access to new scientific advancements helped create the larger green revolution of the late 1960s and 70s. Food, at least for many people (especially those who experienced the benefits of western imperialism), became much more secure. Greater convenience and decreased labor intensity helped some farmers integrate more fully into the comforts of the American middle class. Science, the rationale claimed, was responsible for these boons.

Yet, the most important part of this ideology was not the mere pursuit of scientific inquiry but rather the conviction that large agricultural firms should be the ones to control its direction. These agribusinesses believed that they were at the heart of human progress, that their control over science and technology would create a better world. The technological revolution of the postwar period only served to increase this excessive belief in the power of their own ingenuity. Blind faith in the possibility of science to solve problems, even the ones that they themselves helped to create, was an innate part of agribusiness’ ideological makeup. This principle resounded within these corporations. Now, they wanted that same faith to resonate with a key audience, the farmers themselves.

Trying to change the various opinions and traditions of farmers was often a failed pastime of other high modernist practitioners working for the state and within academia. Private companies, however, often used high modernism with different goals in mind. The wider purpose of large companies involved in agriculture remained the desire to essentialize themselves to the system, to make their presence indispensable in order to secure their financial future. Locking in their role as scientific vanguards was a decisive part of this goal. If farmers came to believe in a similar ideology, that these companies were the producers of agricultural

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441 Food security is defined by the condition of reliable access to nutritious food stuffs.
progress, then they would come to see agribusiness as a critical tool to the farming process itself. Agribusiness’ use of science and technology was then just another way to reinforce farmers’ dependence on private entities. For once farmers jumped on the bandwagon of industrial farming, most found out that it was difficult to jump off.

**Agribusiness and the Conquest of Nature**

One of the most crucial elements of the agribusiness’ strain of high modernist ideology was the belief in not just the possibility of biological control, but also that nature itself could and should be mastered and improved by humans. Agriculture as a system lends itself to this assumption. Farming posits that, to some extent, humans can control their environment to ensure the viability of crops and livestock. Even the earliest settled civilizations learned to alter their landscapes to their needs. Some harnessed the power of flood plains to guarantee adequate irrigation and soil fertility.442 Others utilized planned biodiversity to safeguard against diseases and ensure soil quality.443 Later peoples constantly refined the biology of plants and animals. For example, Sam White’s article “From Globalized Pig Breeds to Capitalist Pigs,” demonstrated how people in Europe during the eighteenth century imported Chinese pigs as breeding stock, eventually overcoming environmental factors to enhance the production capabilities of their hogs.444 Yet, throughout all of this, it remained clear that man (emphasis on man because of gender assumptions of stewardship) could not completely regulate his environment. Sometimes

the floods did not come or competing plant and animal species destroyed carefully planned fields. Human manipulation could only go so far.

It was this belief in limitations that the acolytes of high modernism sought to change. The laws of the universe were rational, they argued, and therefore humans need only apply rationalism to the landscape in order to fully control it. Enlightenment thinkers alleged that science could be used to order nature. Once the chaos of the world was made legible, experts could then modify the environment to fulfill humans’ greatest needs, whereby creating a utopian landscape that would provide for its people in the most efficient way. Of course, questions of what this perfect environment, this utopia, looked like were to be answered by those who had the most to gain from it. It was in their best interest to keep jurisdiction over scientific dominion.

The father of the scientific method himself, Francis Bacon, helped usher in a new age of human domination over the environment, using rhetoric that legitimized mastery over nature (and metaphorically, women). Agribusinesses claimed the legacy of this ideology. They resolutely believed that science and technology should be used to master the landscape. In fact, corporations believed that it was the environment’s very uncontrollable nature that produced the most serious agricultural problems. Uncontrollable meant standards of uniformity and predictability could not be applied. Environmental chaos created many of the issues that plagued humanity. Luckily for farmers, these businesses preached a new vision of what the countryside could be. Much like the Enlightenment thinkers and state officials before them, agribusinesses

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envisioned a new kind of environment, one in which science and technology gave farmers the tools and expertise to control the landscape and master nature itself.

Agribusinesses utilized science and technology as a philosophical device to craft an imagined environmental future, in which man applied scientific development to master agricultural landscapes. Scholar Diana K. Davis has employed the term “environmental imaginary” to discuss historical perceptions of the Middle East. She defined the term as the, “constellation of ideas that groups of humans develop about a given landscape, usually local or regional, that commonly includes assessments about that environment as well as how it came to be in its current state.” While Davis argued that Western conceptions of the Middle East centered on orientalism, agribusinesses used environmental imaginary to rhetorically conceive of their own planned landscape, an environment that needed agribusiness’ products and expertise to achieve its full industrial potential. Agribusinesses looked to help farmers harness the full capabilities of their land, imagining a future where the farmer had complete control over his farmstead. But only through the full exposure to science and technology, produced by private companies, would man finally be able to conquer the fickle whims of nature. In this way, agribusinesses, like the imperial state, used imagined environments to justify their expansionist actions toward rural communities. Obviously, American farmers had much more power and voice than the colonialized peoples of Northern Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, agribusiness deployed science and technology as a conception to convince farmers of the possibility of a controlled landscape in the future.


449 Clearly this not the first time people had used imagined environments in American agriculture. Both Carolyn Merchant and William Cronon showed how Native conceptions and treatment of land in New England differed from the imagined environments of incoming Europeans. Land speculators in the nineteenth century sometimes lured
Mastery over nature was a critical element in agribusinesses’ overall perception of the role of science and technology. What was one of the most startling elements of their view of the environment was that these entities actually believed in the possibility of total control. People involved in agribusiness often commented that their innovations allowed man a power that he did not possess before. The managing editor of the chemical trade journal mentioned that primitive man could use nature only as he found it, lacking any ability to mold it to his liking.\(^{450}\) John Deere argued that the tough sod of the prairie barred early man from reaching the rich soil below.\(^{451}\) According to International Harvester, the cotton plant resisted changes to its slow and tedious method of harvesting, forcing man to continue hand picking for thousands of years.\(^{452}\) These assumptions describe the pre-agribusiness farming process as stagnant and the land and its plants as willful, implying that only with the advent of scientific innovation would there be opportunities to master the environment.

Of course, the reason why these companies made such distinctions between the before and the after was to show how their own control of science and technology allowed for greater ecological manipulation. It was their expertise that provided the necessary equipment and knowledge to remake the landscape to better fulfill the desires of farmers. Monsanto advocated using its scientific testing to accurately determine the condition of the land and therefore know

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\(^{450}\) James E. Payne, “Architects of Molecule,” part of “A Better America Through Chemical Progress Program,” circa 1950s-60s, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.

\(^{451}\) John Deere, “Makers of Plenty: John Deere…the Man and the Company,” 1962, 4-6, Box 551, File 08816, International Harvester Central File.

\(^{452}\) International Harvester, “Machine Cotton Picking with the McCormick-Deering Cotton Picker,” 1940s, 3-4, Box 524, File 4267, International Harvester Central File.
the proper blend of fertilizer to use. After all, a master steward, “can’t afford land that just loafs around.” Whipping the land into shape was also the job of mechanical implements. These machines did not just ease the burden of labor for farmers, but also actively reshaped the land to fit into modern agriculture. Much as a father governs and cares for his children, so too should the farmer mold his fields and flocks into imagined future possibilities. Using machines consequently was a way to achieve these dreams, “for the land is a heritage to husband, and only by conserving it can the nation be kept strong and prosperous.” Mastery ultimately hinged on perceptions of control. The environment needed to be brought to task. With the aid of science and technology, crafted and given to farmers by company experts, farmers could transform the land into a production paradise.

The connection between control and the power to alter nature was a prominent theme in the postwar era’s burgeoning chemical revolution. Monsanto argued that its agricultural chemists controlled the essence of life itself, creating an era, “when the farmer will have cheap, easily applied fungicides and insecticides that will build a strong and impenetrable chemical fence around his crops, leaving only weather and markets to trouble his mind.” Images of an impenetrable and well-defended barrier conjured a battle between chemicals and the pests. This war-like rhetoric was a favorite of the chemical industry, whose promotions often raised images of battle between a harmful and uncontrollable environment and company experts. The chemical industry employed an “army of scientists, technologists, and engineers” to develop

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453 Monsanto, “Fertilize your pasture this fall Advertisement,” circa early 1960s, Series 10, Box 2, File 10, Monsanto Collection.
455 James E. Payne, “Architects of Molecule,” part of “A Better America Through Chemical Progress Program,” circa 1950s-60s, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
456 Given that farmers often viewed nature as either an ally or adversary (rarely neutral), it was a marketing theme that worked well.
products. Monsanto’s pesticide Wallop, “banishes weeds and worms in one blow.”

Santobane, known by its trade name DDT, stood against the “hordes” of insects that threatened the world’s food supply. It was a show of force against nature, a defense against the chaos of the untamed wild. Producers were not there to work with the land, but to overcome it. Chemicals provided by agribusinesses helped farmers do just that.

What made this rhetoric work was its villainization of those uncontrollable aspects of the environment. Bugs did not eat plants because it was a part of their innate biological drive; they did so because they wanted to devour human food security. Weeds choked the life from “useful” plants because they were a malevolent force. Diseases struck chicken hatcheries or swine lots with purpose. Monsanto emphasized the danger presented by these pests in multiple of ways. Sometimes the company described weeds and other unwanted flora and fauna as useless, ugly, or laborious. Other promotions took on a much more sinister tone. In the late 1940s, the company began calling weeds by the nickname “green death.” In an advertisement featuring a malevolent jungle of weeds menacing a garden, Monsanto declared, “simply put, weeds steal profit.” But chemical companies were not the only agribusiness to villainize the unmanageable aspects of nature. When discussing his travels abroad, Roswell Garst noted the sorry state of farming in Central America, outlining that their corn production was low, their cattle too skinny, and their food production unable to keep up with an exploding population. He attributed this not to political instability or economic degradation (or clear imperialist measures), but rather to their

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457 Monsanto, “Your Food and Chemical Research” number one in the series “Chemistry in the Service of Man,” May 1953, 11-12, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collections.
458 Monsanto, “Wallop Advertisement,” 1966, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
459 Monsanto, “Why should they feast…while millions hunger,” Monsanto Magazine 27, no. 1 (February 1948): 1, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
failure to adopt new scientific advancements to resolve these problems. Luckily for the people of Central America, various charitable and private entities were already establishing research missions and businesses in the area.\textsuperscript{462} It seemed that agribusinesses and their clients were very much at war with an out of control environment. Or as one advertisement in the seed trade journal \textit{Right off the Cob} declared, “Modernization in the Implements of Business Is as Essential as Modernization in the Implements of War!”\textsuperscript{463} The battle over who would win the day seemed to center on who had the tools to control the uncontrollable.

Agribusinesses’ development of a villainous enemy was done primarily to emphasize the need to eliminate ecological variables in favor of uniform environment, the true hallmark of man’s conquest of nature.\textsuperscript{464} Untamed landscapes held a number of negative consequences for farms, including inefficiency, waste, and loss of profit. However, the primary issue for agribusinesses was that it stymied the possibility of standardization. Standards implied a level of predictability that offered farmers a chance at factory like production. Uniformity would increase both yield and profit, allowing farmers to avoid setbacks that cost them time and money. It also freed them from the shackles of traditional agriculture, which forced farmers to negotiate with the land rather than take what they wanted from it. This is why eliminating these variables was so critical. Corporations saw them as the enemies of agricultural progress and hoped for a future where many of the problems of the past would be eliminated. If an unruly landscape demonstrated poor farming techniques, lack of managerial skills, and inefficiency, then an

\textsuperscript{462} Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, August 5, 1964, 1-2, Box 9, File 35, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

\textsuperscript{463} “Implements of War! Advertisement,” \textit{Right off the Cob} 8, no. 6, (November-December, 1953): 4, Series 10, Box 2, File 7, Monsanto Collection.

\textsuperscript{464} Through its legacy is complicated and still widely debated, the Enlightenment’s emphasis on classification helped ideologically separate “useful” and “un-useful” flora and fauna. For more information on how Enlightenment thinkers viewed nature, see Peter Hanns Reill, \textit{Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
organized environment represented a master overseer who had accepted the role of professional expertise. In the eyes of these agribusinesses, variety was not the spice of life.

Uniformity was the basis of agribusiness’ imagined future of the agricultural environment. It was an abstract landscape that looked remarkably similar across different regions, crop types, and local economies. Predictability was the end-goal and scientific innovation was means of getting there. Mechanical products would create a regulated field with precisely edged rows. Tractors and implements carved out straight lines; new liquid sprayers generated, “more uniform spreading--finer shredding.”

Chemical fertilizers encouraged a stronger stand and provided a nutritious boost for crops. Pesticides killed off any competing plants. As Monsanto highlighted in its article on the rice growing McGowan family, these farmers “were among the first to evade hit-or-miss compromises by exploiting new herbicides designed specifically for removing weeds from rice.”

The resulting combination of chemical additives produced a heady vision of an orderly and resilient field of monoculture. The crops themselves possessed uniformity not just from row to row, but even from region to region. Hybrid strains provided wind and drought resistance, bigger ears, and heavier stalks. Their uniform appearance allowed for easier mechanical harvesting, with combines and pickers collecting the grain in a regulated fashion. The agricultural process, not just the products, would also possess elements of homogeneity. Academic and company experts all suggested that farmers begin to adapt to a more standardized (and scientifically approved) version of planting and harvesting. For example, Pioneer was especially keen on showing the advantages of early

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466 Monsanto, “Rice in their Dish,” Monsanto Magazine 45, no. 1 (March 1965) 10, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
467 Letter to Wisconsin Salesmen from Leith Nelson, April 6, 1955, Box 1, File 76, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
planting practices (which would ensure earlier orders of their seed corn). Their message was simple, uniformity was good and the scientific products made farmers the “boss at planting time.”

Standardization found a welcome home in the corporate meeting rooms of the meat production industry. Perhaps because of the appeal of factory-like precision and efficiency, packers involved in the transformation of livestock and poultry into meat products found mastery over nature (both biological and ecological) to be an important element to their postwar mentality. The poultry industry specifically connected faith in the corporate scientific and technological process with changing consumer tastes. Contract farming, which would soon become the primary agricultural system for poultry production, fit nicely within this ideal. Advocates claimed that contract growing allowed the industry as a whole to become more efficient, cost effective, and scientific. Other observers also mentioned how this type of production gave chicken a pricing edge over its pork and beef competitors. Secondly, the biology of chickens made them an ideal candidate for regulated uniformity in taste, texture, and appearance. The ability to separate different stages of the broiler process allowed companies like Perdue, Tyson, and Pilgrim’s Pride to gain greater control over the standards of their product.

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468 Letter to Kenyon T. Payne from Mark Mueller, March 31 1964, Box 9, File 6, Pioneer Eastern Division Records; Letter to Salesmen from Roswell Garst, July 2, 1960 and Letter to Supervisors from Roswell Garst, May 9 1960, Box 8, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division.
Perdue Chicken eventually ventured into processing the chicken itself, allowing the company to enact more exacting standards for slaughter and evisceration. Firms could then meaningfully market “quality control” as a clear indicator of their product, ensuring that their product met the standards of customers. This was confirmed by different butchers throughout New York City’s boroughs. One butcher from the S.D. Palma Market in Queens remarked that it was Perdue’s uniformity that attracted area housewives. Others also noted that Perdue’s chicken sizing, color, and overall consistency impressed local customers.

It was this system of homogeneity that other meat industries tried to imitate, often with less success. Pork in particular struggled to keep up with consumer demand for greater uniformity and changes in taste. Packers spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to persuade farmers to change their hog production methods. Facing fluctuating demand and supply, some pork packers attempted to move into the cattle market to stabilize their profit margins. Rath Packing tried to break into the beef industry by emphasizing the uniformity of their Black Hawk Beef: “a lesser grade variance means more uniform selection…no extreme high or low within grade.” The company claimed that their carcasses were, “suited for dealers who want high quality meat but dislike waste of U.S. Choice quality…better cutting yield…less fat trim.” Nevertheless, pork producers faced an uphill battle as the decades went on. Even the relative size of their animals, particularly with the emphasis on bigger and bigger carcasses,
seemed to hurt their retail value. As scholars Bernard Tobin and Henry Arthur pointed out, poultry held advantages over pork and beef because of their of inventory value. Buying whole cattle or hogs often created a backlog of less-desirable or more expensive cuts. On the other hand, chickens could be sold whole without creating storage problems.\footnote{Bernard Tobin and Henry Arthur, “Dynamics of the Adjustment In the Broiler Industry,” 114-121, Box 29, File 293, Perdue Chicken Records.} While poultry producers were able to manipulate variables in biology, some livestock packers struggled to adopt these changes.

Despite these setbacks for some, most agribusinesses continued to emphasize how they brought scientific standards to control and aid in the mastery of the environment during the postwar era. In fact, one of the best methods for showcasing their ideology was to demonstrate how the corporate use of science allowed people to control extreme environments. The Rio Grande Valley, for instance, offered a great opportunity to illustrate the power that agribusiness’ products could wield over the wild.\footnote{Not a traditional valley, but a floodplain, the Rio Grande Valley requires massive irrigational infrastructure to support an agricultural cycle based on citrus, fruits, vegetables, sugarcane, and subtropical crops.} Calling the area the “magic valley,” Monsanto described how, “Engineers, chemists, and agriculturalists have cooperated to make the valley one of the leading year-round garden spots in the world.” Of course, nature refused to bestow the bounty willingly, so one must, “use elbow grease; you can't cultivate in a coffee shop and spray from a beer barrel.” And this elbow grease just happen to work because of the right combination of agricultural scientific know-how and application.\footnote{Monsanto, “The Magic Valley,” Monsanto Magazine 35, no. 2, (March-April 1955), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.} Man could conquer and recraft the landscape to fit his needs, but only if he embraced the corporate power of science and technology. Other problematic regions featured a similar re-formation via private scientific innovation. The cattle lands of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona received a chemical solution to their

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overgrown mesquite problem. The Sonoran Desert in Mexico, was “brought to life” when area farmers turned, “to the technology of modern agriculture.” Agribusinesses, with their command of scientific innovation, made it possible for even the most willful of environments to be brought to heel.

In the end, agribusiness’s physical and ideological transformation of the land also helped remake popular cultural conceptions of agriculture. Visions of prosperous and uniform fields, stewarded by a happy independent farmer, became a trope well-used by various businesses within the food and fiber industry. Changing conceptions of food and farming allowed private institutions a chance to not just recraft American images of the land or the farmer, but the process of agriculture itself. These companies gradually removed agricultural complexity as more and more people lost touch with rurality and embraced surface-level perceptions offered by these agribusinesses. It would have a profound effect on American understanding of agriculture’s past, present, and future.

The Best of Frienemies: Agribusiness and Public Institutions

Finally, another important element of agribusiness’ relationship with science and technology centered ownership of knowledge. These agribusinesses clearly saw scientific innovation as both a public service and a private commodity that could be bought and sold. While various public institutions formed the backbone of traditional agricultural expertise, agribusinesses explicitly sought to craft their own hold over perceptions of scientific development. This commodification was an intrinsic aspect of the agribusiness relationship with conceptions of science and technology, one that permitted them to deepen the interdependence

483 Monsanto, “A Steak in Your Future,” *Monsanto Magazine* 31, no. 3 (August 1952), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
484 Monsanto, “Seeds of Plenty,” *Monsanto Magazine* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1968), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
between themselves, farmers, and customers. Corporate pursuit of agricultural development also placed them in deliberate contact with other groups that shared and regulated the food and fiber industry. The USDA, state extension services, experiment stations, and land grant universities all interacted with these various agribusinesses in remarkably parallel ways. A high modernist view of science, though tinted with perhaps different understandings of ownership, was then the setting within which agribusinesses and these other entities operated.

Despite similar visions of the agricultural future, dueling conceptions of public good versus private need sometimes caused rifts between academics and agribusiness. As such, the postwar period witnessed agribusinesses reaffirming their own hold over expertise and the importance of the private scientific enterprise. These agribusinesses, however aided by public entities, almost always sought to increase their explicit control over science and technology. Their interactions with government bureaucrats and university scientists’ ultimately then fell in line with their overarching goal: the essentialization of themselves to the modern agricultural system.

Out of all of the various interactions, agribusinesses perhaps had the most frequent relations with the world of academia. In fact, because of the longstanding contact between universities and rural spaces, this relationship may have been the most important one for agribusinesses to cultivate. Without the backing of state systems and their own allegiance to high modernist ideals, agribusinesses may have found it very difficult to infiltrate rural communities without academic help. These public experts had long developed a dialogue with rural communities, providing advice, running local organizations, and offering a vehicle for communal social interaction.\footnote{See Danbom, \textit{Resisted Revolution}, 97-120; Rosenberg, \textit{4-H Harvest}, 88-186.} For instance, Monsanto’s employee J.H. Senger remarked that the local
extension service assisted the company in the quest to increase use of agricultural chemicals among farmers, providing a strong educational tool in rural spaces.\textsuperscript{486} These public outreach programs shaped, or at least tried to shape, expectations for agricultural production. But the relationship was not a one-way street. Luckily for private businesses, these institutions and their experts also needed the growing food and fiber industry (specifically company dollars) to continue their own work. Therefore, dual need bound the two institutions together, even as issues over authority sometimes made their relationship contentious. By reaching out to these institutions, agribusinesses sought to reaffirm their own position of authority and provided credibility for their private expertise.

The development of this relationship, which had always been present in the twentieth century but intensified after the Second World War, was based on the exchange of gifts, ideas, and people. Because both institutions shared a similar vision of America’s agricultural future, this interchange generally featured mutual goals. On one hand, agribusinesses often provided free products and funding to these academic experts. Pioneer and other seed houses almost always gave free seed corn for testing by land-grant colleges or experiment stations;\textsuperscript{487} Perdue Chicken helped fund university poultry specialists in the Delmarva region.\textsuperscript{488} Monsanto, working with university chemists, tried to refine their use of pesticides.\textsuperscript{489} Rath Packing, with the aid of

\textsuperscript{486} J.H. Senger, “Case History How a New Product is Marketing,” 22, in \textit{Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate}, June 29 and 30, 1965, Series 11, Box 2, File 5, Monsanto Collection.

\textsuperscript{487} For example, in 1955, Pioneer Eastern Division sent free bushels to research institutes in Alabama, Connecticut, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. A variety of letters to these research institutions have be found in File 82 “Experiment Stations,” Box 1, Pioneer Eastern Division Records). Also see, “Better Grading of Seed Corn Needed,” \textit{Right Off the Cob} 7, no. 6 (November-December 1952), Series 10, Box 2, File 7, Monsanto Collection.


\textsuperscript{489} Monsanto, “Feed Bin Science: American Tables Benefit when Chemistry Joins Hands with the Farmer,” \textit{Monsanto Magazine} 26, no. 4 (September 1946), Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection; Ferdinand Zienty, “Roots: Origin of the Monsanto Agricultural Chemical Enterprise,” June 21, 1969, 3-4, Series 10, Box 5, File 20, Monsanto Collection.
other pork companies, sponsored university breeding programs and outreach to hog farmers. These donations would help universities perform company-friendly experiments and facilitate transmission of information to rural people.

Given that companies gave away part of their capital, they were often able to control the direction of university research. This frequently narrowed the search for agricultural solutions in a way that directly benefited agribusinesses. For example, sponsorship by chemical companies constricted the study of pest control, allowing chemistry to crowd out biological, entomological, and other sources of management. Hybrid corn companies intensified university research on hybridization and limited the study of single cross breeding or open-pollination techniques, despite the fact that this method could have offered similar yields. This essentially provided these companies with hegemonic control over the direction of seed corn research. During the 1950s, Pioneer’s Eastern Division sponsored a number of different experiments and renewable graduate fellowships, an event that would become a common occurrence as the years went on. In turn, universities permitted the company to “suggest” projects and receive their experimental results (a move that Pioneer usually insisted on). And these experiments themselves were not cheap. One 1954 proposed project cost $3,600, with the money going towards graduate student salary, tuition, travel, and research expenses. Another cooperative agreement cost the company $6,000 dollars, a sizable investment that would today cost over $50,000.

Yet, this exchange was hardly a one sided affair. For their sponsorship, agribusinesses received a number of different benefits, including free information, public endorsements of

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products and company projects, and support for private, corporate expertise. Perhaps most importantly, they benefited from the scientific research itself. University specialists helped work out kinks in various products, focusing on improvements that would benefit the industry as a whole. Monsanto stated that it was the experimental work done by scientists at Iowa State University that allowed for the development of their pesticides, Randox and Ramrod.\textsuperscript{493} International Harvester’s cotton pickers did not reach their full potential until the development of specialty cotton strains by university scientists.\textsuperscript{494} Even more than these interactions, agribusinesses also freely used information provided by these public institutions to secure their own scientific authority in the eyes of farmers. Many publications quoted or outright published academic studies that supported company goals. For example, Pioneer circulated a study done by University of Maryland scientists on the market viability of corn over grass.\textsuperscript{495} In 1964, Monsanto issued a news release describing the damage done by wild oats and how the company, along with universities, developed Avadex and Far-go-2 to solve the problem.\textsuperscript{496} Using academic studies was a way to support corporate aspirations from a seemingly unbiased source. It also buttressed claims of scientific expertise from the companies themselves. By propping up their own status as scientific equals to university professors, corporations reinforced that they worked with universities in agricultural improvements. It was a fundamental part of the agribusiness commodification of knowledge. As private institutions staked a claim on scientific expertise,

\textsuperscript{493} J.H. Senger, “Case History How a New Product is Marketing,” 22, in \textit{Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate}, June 29 and 30, 1965, Series 11, Box 2, File 5, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{494} International Harvester, “Cotton: better methods for better living,” circa late 1960s-early 1970s, 9, Box 524, File 11338, International Harvester Central File.
\textsuperscript{495} Loren Pope, “Don’t let Grass Divorce you from Corn, says U. of Maryland,” \textit{Pioneer Kernels}, April 1955, 4, Box 2, File 26, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{496} Monsanto Public Relations Department, “New Release,” February 18, 1964, 2, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
they were able recraft expectations of ownership of knowledge, reorienting understandings of what could be bought and sold.

Along with exchanges of money and information, these companies also hired many former students and professors from land-grants, creating a cross-pollination of expertise. Pioneer’s Eastern Division’s sales manager, A.R. Marston, had previously spent eighteen years working for Michigan State’s agronomy department before moving to the company. When getting in the business of processing their own birds, Perdue Chicken chose to hire Don Mabe, a student with a graduate degree in poultry science from North Carolina State. Monsanto frequently head hunted employees among the hallways of the university system, especially after it became clear that agricultural chemicals were going to be a big money-maker for the company. When creating a new management post for crop technology, the company snagged assistant professor Earl Spurrier from the University of Illinois. The chemical corporation also staffed their franchise stores with graduates of the local land-grant. Both Monsanto and International Harvester clearly believed that maintaining this network of expertise was critical to maintaining their hold over the industry. An International Harvester public relations review meeting in 1970 explained that the company needed to continue its outreach on campus “even during lean times.” Monsanto created a special post, held by a former professor, to coordinate the relationship between the company and various universities. They even initiated a three day

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498 Monsanto Public Relations Department, “New Release,” January 26, 1965, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
499 Chemical Week, “Presents the 1964 Kirkpatrick Award for Management Achievement to Monsanto Company,” Savoy Plaza, NYC, December 2, 1964, 6, Series 13, Box 1, File 15, Monsanto Collection.
501 Monsanto Public Relations Department, “New Release,” January 22, 1962, Series 1, Box 1, File 6, Monsanto Collection.
seminar to attract college students who were, “oblivious to the fact that industry and trade are the chief wellspring of our relative affluence.”\footnote{502 “Business Loses Its Lure,” Chemical Week, July 17 1965, in Selected talks from the seminar on Business Opportunities for the Chemist and Chemical Engineer Graduate, June 29 and 30, 1965, 4, Series 11, Box 2, File 5, Monsanto Collection.} This web of experts, both private and public, allowed for a hybridization of scientific knowledge as a private commodity that could be bought for the public good. While public institutions were (and are) supposed to be free of favoritism or bias, private funding made it difficult to resist company desires. This was a fact that many agribusinesses were well aware of and sought to exploit. Moreover, this intermingling of experts blurred the line between the public, the private, and who produced scientific innovation. When university professors and students became private employees, they brought both their scientific knowledge \textit{and} a public persona with them. By employing these men, agribusinesses achieved some semblance of authority. It justified the commodification of scientific solutions and the weight of those solutions in the agricultural industry.

These relationships also went beyond financial assistance and mutual employment. Public and private institutions also shared a mutual vision of the future of agriculture, one that depended on both input industries to supply the material and research to continually improve the product. Upon signing the 1955 cooperative research agreement, Michigan State’s agronomy department head, Kenyon Payne, waxed, “there is a tremendous future ahead if responsible industry and agricultural experiment stations…and join forces toward a common objective.”\footnote{503 Letter to Robert Woods from Keyon Payne, March 2, 1955, Box 1, File 108, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.} Pioneer’s general manager Robert Woods replied that similar research programs would “make for a better feeling between commercial companies and experiment stations.”\footnote{504 Letter to Keyon Payne from Robert Woods, March 7, 1955, Box 1, File 108, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.} Monsanto declared that cooperation between themselves and academia helped educational outreach to
farmers, leading to agricultural progress.\textsuperscript{505} Other state agronomists were even more direct in their desire to promote hybrids. A.D. Stuart, an Extension Specialist from North Carolina, hoped that the company’s continued cooperation would ensure the state’s farmers would convert the remaining forty percent of corn acreage to hybrids. In hopes of “making progress,” Stuart asked if Pioneer would be willing to send free seed corn to county agents and vocational agriculture teachers throughout the state. It was a request that Pioneer quickly answered, offering free two pound samples to every county agent or vocational-agricultural instructor in the state.\textsuperscript{506}

Although agribusinesses had a cozy relationship with these agricultural scientists, a certain amount of tension also existed. While these companies courted and used land-grant institutions and the state extension service, they also conflicted over claims to expertise. Who exactly was the expert became muddled even as ties between these institutions grew closer. Pioneer’s desire to control information led the company to subtly challenge academic positions by presenting their own research as superior, often directly to the farmers and local agents themselves. In one internal company letter, Indiana Pioneer’s Vance York remarked that the first draft of a company alfalfa bulletin held too many quotes and references by university agronomists.\textsuperscript{507} Other times, however, the restrained nature of the conflict turned into a more obvious dustup between “experts.” Occasionally, academics did not approve of the agribusinesses’ tactics and their consequences in the rural community. One unnamed extension agent in 1934 wrote that the developing broiler industry was, “being falsely promoted by propaganda which is being distributed by feed manufacturers, incubator companies, poultry

\textsuperscript{505} Ferdinand Zient, “Roots: Origin of the Monsanto Agricultural Chemical Enterprise,” presented on June 21, 1969, 13, Series 10, Box 5, File 20, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{506} Letter to A.R. Marston from A.D. Stuart, March 12, 1956, Box 2, File 54, Pioneer Eastern Division Records; Letter to A.D. Stuart from A.R. Marston, March 22, 1956, Box 2, File 54, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{507} Letter to Gordon McCleary from Vance York, October 24, 1963, Box 10, File 13, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
journals, hatcherymen, lumber dealers, real estate dealers, and others who have things to sell.”

He concluded that this unstable base spelled future disaster for the region’s chicken farmers. Such an affront would not go unchallenged. Nursing a grudge for over twenty years, DPI responded to this and other claims of big businesses domination. They denied that corporations inhibited local wealth and competition, saying, “Growers are free to decide if they want to grow broilers, and if so, how many, as well as on what basis (independent or under contractual agreement) they will grow chickens.” DPI also maintained that contract growing actually helped farmers, allowing them to take on the labor without the risk.

One other telling instance was a clash between Michigan State’s Department of Farm Crops (headed by Kenyon Payne) and Pioneer’s Eastern Division, two institutions that until 1959 held a mutually beneficial relationship. The company’s general manager complained that Pioneer’s own research plots had failed to yield similar results, with the heavy implication that either the test or the researcher was biased against the company. But the land-grant was not going to take that insinuation lying down. E.C. Rossman, professor in the crops department, defended the experiment’s results and his own department’s role in it claiming, “We attempt at all times to conduct the trials without bias or favoritism.” Then, in his own understated jab at the company, Rossman remarked

I realize that this drop in the number of entries reflects your lack of confidence in the trials. Several other seed companies have markedly increased their number of entries

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511 Letter to Kenyon Payne from Robert Woods, April 14, 1959, Box 6, File 40, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.

during the same period of time. If there is anything to the point with more entries one stands a better chance of coming out on top, it appears to me that decreasing the number of entries would be a mistake.\footnote{Ibid.}

Perhaps to salve any sore feelings left by his professor, Payne sent a missive to the company observing that differences in opinion were good and ensuring that the communication lines would remain open.\footnote{Letter to Robert Wood from Kenyon Payne, May 18, 1959, Box 6, File 40, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.}

While agribusiness sometimes faced challenges to their dominance by university scientists, both private and public entities maintained a similar understanding of the place of scientific discovery in human progress and their own role as authority figures. By the postwar period, America witnessed the full turn of a curious transformation: the transfer of agricultural expertise from farmers (who actually produced the agricultural commodities) to various outside entities. As this specific perception of science and technology became more entrenched within different organizations, both private and public, many came to believe that farmers themselves did not know how to farm in an appropriately modern fashion. Instead, they needed to be shown new scientific methods, which, not coincidently, required the aid of these businesses. Authority over agriculture therefore shifted from the actual local producer to a group of scientific experts.

Though quick to celebrate the farmer for his perceived virtue, these agribusinesses firmly believed that the increasingly technical nature of agriculture made it impossible for farmers to fully grasp these necessary changes. Rather, farmers needed the help of agricultural experts to explain the finer points of their profession. Monsanto argued that after the Second World War, farming had become increasingly technical, requiring the use of “professional advisors” to bring
correct information to the farmer.\textsuperscript{515} Other times, modern applications were “too complicated” for farmers to understand and they needed someone with a professional background to translate. When developing new sales literature for the 1960 season, Pioneer employee R.A. Bibbins suggested that the company focus on production methods, as breeding research was too technical for farmers to understand.\textsuperscript{516} Earlier in December, the Eastern Division general manager praised research department scientist Owen Newlin for his breakdown of research breeding to salesmen (area farmers), most of whom could not understand the complicated process of seed production and therefore failed to realize how progressive Pioneer actually was.\textsuperscript{517} By the late 1960s, this shift in authority and expertise appeared so widespread that some even questioned the foundational conceptions of farming itself. If companies controlled the input and output production, if these corporation were both the producer, processor, and marketer of commodities, did that not make them farmers? Sure, they did not necessarily meet the traditional definition, but it was the companies that actually controlled agricultural production. Through their use of science and technology, corporations had allowed agriculture to progress beyond many of the problems of the past. No wonder retailer Seth Shaw pondered, “just who is the farmer in this case?”\textsuperscript{518}

So the real question then became: who was the farmer in a modern system so wholly based on the widespread implementation of science and technology? The answer for agribusinesses was simple: they were. Their use of scientific knowledge and extensive application allowed them to conceive of a better future, one in which man would have full

\textsuperscript{515} Monsanto, “Seeding New Fields,” \textit{Monsanto Magazine} 45, no. 4, (October 1965): 7-11, Series 8, Box 12, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{516} Letter to Owen Newlin from R.A. Bibbins, March 20, 1959, Box 7, File 7, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{517} Letter to James Wallace from Robert Woods, December 22, 1958, Box 7, File 18, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{518} Seth T. Shaw, “A Retail View Of Agribusiness,” given at annual agribusiness seminar, June 11, 1968, Box 34, File 359, Perdue Chicken Records.
control of his environment. Ultimately, just as agricultural companies reimagined their history and attempted to reshape the identity of farmers on an individual level, so too did they utilize certain perceptions of science and technology to integrate themselves more fully into the agricultural system. Their place as innovators granted them authority to evangelize the scientific power, which in turn reinforced agribusinesses’ perceived role in agriculture. But while belief is all well and good, acceptance is another matter altogether. If customers were not buying whatever agribusinesses were selling, then there would not be an agribusiness system for very much longer. In order to integrate farmers and food consumers in their vision of agriculture, specifically a highly industrialized large scale system, agribusinesses needed to develop a marketing scheme, one that justified the price of admission. Luckily, America’s changing conceptions of consumerism also provided a vehicle to do just that. Witnessing the advent of the nation as a Consumers’ Republic, agribusinesses arranged their products and ideology under the mantel of the “cult of convenience.”
CHAPTER SIX: THE CULT OF CONVENIENCE: CHANGES IN FOOD RETAIL

Opening in 1957, “The House of Tomorrow” became Disneyland’s latest hit attraction. Sponsored and created by Monsanto, this house gave customers a glimpse into what Americans could possibly enjoy by the mid-1980s. Over the next three years, over six million visitors walked through the walls of this structure to ogle at the possibility of the future. With its bold lines, synthetic fabrics, and curved walls, this house seemed to offer an impossible number of advancements to wow the amazed crowds. One of the most popular rooms proved to be the kitchen. Stocked with advanced appliances, including a high-powered microwave for quick cooking, refrigerated pantry to freeze and store foodstuffs, and a sonic dishwasher for easy clean up, the kitchen looked to be a homemaker’s dream. Quick, easy, and most of all convenient, Monsanto’s house offered a happy future where the homemaker could enjoy all the benefits of modernity without the backbreaking drudgery of the past. In fact, in using the materials provided by the corporation, the whole family could find their food production and consumption completely changed for the better: “The fun is making the most of the ultimate in kitchen convenience and efficiency. A dream of the future brought to reality by Monsanto.”519 No longer a slave to the stove, Monsanto claimed to hold the key to unchaining America’s wives and mothers. Their ability to provide time-saving technology would deliver on their promise that “tomorrow is always built on today.”

This belief was reflected not just in Monsanto’s corporate attractions, but also within the wider transformation of the food retail industry after the Second World War. Just as agribusinesses involved in commodity production in agriculture looked to solidify its place

through the promise of biological control, so to would corporations connected to food retail (including processors, packers, supermarket chains, appliance manufacturers, and others), utilize a similar conception to ensure their continued dominance of this industry. For food retailers though, this promotion would center on their assurance of convenience. As a theme, convenience is one of the pillars of modern marketing. Since the 1920s, researchers and academics have documented this conception as a strong motivation in purchasing choice. While the earliest researchers viewed convenience through the lens of the actual purchase (quick and easy buying), the postwar marketer and interested scholars recognized convenience as a perceived attribute credited to the product itself. A convenient product gave the consumer non-pecuniary benefits that could not be completely quantified. Temporal convenience allowed customers to “save time” by using a certain product or service, therefore permitting them to spend their hours on other activities. Like time, “saving effort” has also been acknowledged as an integral part of convenience, though it received much less scholarly attention. Even today, recent studies have shown that convenience continues to have a major impact on both buying decisions and product usage.

For consumers in the postwar era, this mentality can be placed under the umbrella of “the cult of convenience.” Much like the promotion of corporate science and technology for input

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523 The Cult of the Convenience is a term I am using to describe the systematic mentality promoted by output agribusinesses and food retailers during the postwar period. It maintained that customers could expect food production and consumption to be less labor intensive and cheaper without losing quality or taste. However, this
manufacturers, companies on the other end of the agricultural spectrum made “convenience” an elementary aspect of their version of modern food production, a version they transmitted to customers through advertisements, marketing ploys, and other corporate efforts. The cult of convenience promised accessibility, ease, and variety without losing quality assurance. In essence, corporate use and control of science and technology allowed people not just to have their cake and eat it too, but to make the cake with ease, on the cheap, and still have it taste as good as homemade. It permitted consumers to participate in this ideology of the middle class by “enjoying” the benefits of quick and easy meals, therefore letting them spend their time on other activities. By proving that large businesses could bring this convenience to customers, agribusinesses looked to remake the retail landscape and further insinuate corporatization into America’s grocery stores and pantries.

In many ways, convenience and its connection to the ideals of the middle class fit neatly into other changes the retail industry was undergoing. A postwar economic boom and changing attitudes retrained assumptions about consumerism and citizenship, championing mass consumption as both the key to holding on to democratic values and reaching economic prosperity. It also remade the environmental landscape, as demands for housing and new public spaces created suburbia as we know it today.\(^\text{524}\) In this way, mass demand for convenient buying also helped develop another staple of the era, the supermarket. These shopping centers owed much to the vision of collective order and predictability desired by the state and retailers alike. Helped along by federal policy, retailers looked to impose a top-down model of consumerism on one specifically troublesome group of consumers, housewives. Nineteenth and early twentieth

\(^{524}\) Cohen, Consumers’ Republic, 5-15 and 257-289.
century patterns of consumption illustrated a surprising amount of female power. Bargaining and haggling were an intricate part of the shopping experience, with female demand for service and choice the driving force within interactions between retailers and customers. Supermarkets looked to move control from female to institutional authority, relegating housewives to the role of passive consumers in a highly structured world of individual choice.\footnote{Tracey Deutsch, \textit{Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 13-43 and 183-219.} In this vein, convenience was a critical aspect of supermarket development. Beyond the physical benefits (the convenience of buying everything a family needed in one location), supermarkets also seemed to offer accessibility and variety. It was a model that appealed directly to postwar assumptions of middle-class identity, a fulfillment of individual desires through consumerism and the illusion of choice. In this way, the act of buying at a supermarket was a performance that signaled one’s socio-economic status to the wider world.

Just as retail changed after the Second World War, so too did the companies that packaged and supplied the products. The meat industry in particular faced considerable fluctuations within their production and operational processes. For one, American tastes in meat underwent a radical realignment, which in turn affected their systems of production. Appetite for beef and poultry soared as demand for pork and mutton decreased. The steady dominance of the Big Four packers slowly eroded, leading to a period of intensified competition which would eventually leave many former processing and packaging companies dead or sold off by the 1980s. Changing taste and competition even modified the fattening process. Whereas large-scale ranches and grazing had once dominated the American beef and pork market, feedlots and confinement began to replace these older models. Commercial feeders could more easily adopt the newest technological innovations and scientific discoveries, including feed additives and
antibiotics. For ranchers, technological changes and market competition forced many to either expand or close down their operations. Much like farmers involved in dairy production, the growing overhead cost compelled many towards specialization.526

Other innovations also dramatically changed both the physical landscape of packing plants and their processing methods. Perhaps the most transformative aspect was the movement away from large city-centers like Chicago to rural America. Avoiding transportation costs, along with undermining the well-organized meat packing unions, appealed to many corporations, and by 1970, the Windy City’s packing industry was dead. In turn, the move out to the countryside allowed packers to not only become more virulently anti-union, but also to utilize new technology to streamline the handling process. Iowa Beef Packers, today owned by Tyson Foods, remade the industry by dismembering and vacuum packing its own cuts of beef. This avoided the burden of shipping whole sides of beef, which further cut down on distribution costs and standardized specific cuts. This soon became widely adopted by other packers, leading to the vacuum packed, tiny pre-made meat packages consumers buy today.527

**Labor of Love: “Easing” the Labor and Time Burden of Homemakers**

In 1949, Oscar-Award winning actress Spring Byington took on a new role. Playing a helpless housewife “Mrs. America,” Byington slaved away in her house. Overburdened by her food preparation and other duties, Byington ruined her family’s dinner and looked despondently up into the camera. It was here that the focus shifted to another famous actress, 1920s star Eva Novak, now playing a plump and pleasant older homemaker somewhere in Middle America. Novak sympathized with Byington, recalling, “there were certain days when everything was just too much for me.” But luckily, those days were over for Novak. Now, she claimed, “my cooking

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is done in the modern manner.” How so, the viewer was supposed to ask? Well, through the power of new technology, specifically, the pressure cooker. Moving from a weepy tale of woe to a full on infomercial, a booming male narrator informed the audience that pressure cooking cut down on meal preparation time and labor while also improving food quality and taste. By the end, the commercial urged its audience to see pressure cooking as “a new way of cooking,” designed and built by the National Presto Company. This appliance maker was hardly the first or the last to conceive of their products as time and labor saving devices. In fact, the marriage between corporate created technology and easy living was one of the most prominent tropes in the cult of convenience.

This desire for less labor in meal production came from very real pressure on female time management. While cultural normativity presented an image of traditional domestic bliss, with women playing the role of housekeeper, cook, and caregiver, the reality was that more and more women were entering the job market. The immediate postwar years witnessed a large drop off in female employment, only to tick upwards in the 1950s and 60s. In 1950, less than thirty percent of the American labor force were women. By 1975, that number had increased by more than ten percent. Educational opportunities, access to birth control, increasing divorce rates, economic hardship, and other societal trends all prompted female employment across class and racial lines. However, despite these material changes, society’s socio-cultural perception still reflected the assumption of traditional gender roles and expected men and women to conform to these

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528 “Food For Thought,” Industrial Film, directed and written by Herman Boxer (Hollywood, CA: Dudley Pictures Corporation, 1949), accessed online (October 1, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64_gW56fFuc.
529 It is important to note that these labor statistics do not take into account for the informal economy and labor outside of employment, which downplays much of the traditional labor historically done by women, including household management, food production, childcare, and other non-wage work. US Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Women’s Bureau, 1975 Handbook on Women Workers, Bulletin 297, (GPO: Washington D.C., 1975), 3-9.
conventions. Societal customs considered meal preparation (along with other traditional household management) to be the responsibility of the family’s female relatives even if they took on other responsibilities. In this vein, convenience was a very real desire for many women struggling to balance household management.

Yet, changes in household duties were not the only development that had an impact on food production and consumption. The postwar period witnessed a greater adoption of technological advancements to domestic labor. From the microwave to the dishwasher, different appliances altered the preparation and preservation of food on a fundamental level. Advocates stressed these machines as labor saving devices, allowing women to spend less time on chores and more time enjoying family activities or personal hobbies. Of course, as Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s *More Work for Mother* pointed out, these changes did not necessarily provide the labor easement they claimed. In fact, the industrialization of the household only increased the burden on women, freeing men and children to pursue public roles, and relegating women to the realm of unspecialized and isolated domestic labor. Moreover, the hours spent on household labor did not actually fall. Instead, these devices only increased standards of cleanliness and management expected of women.

Food companies and other observers were very much aware of these changes to both meal expectations and widespread adoption of technological advancements in the kitchen. As the primary household spenders, women were an attractive target for companies across the diverse food and fiber industry. Even Monsanto believed that women were the key to developing a

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strong public image.\textsuperscript{532} When speaking on the future of food and farming in America, professor of Agricultural Economics John Hopkins observed that with the increasing number of working women, “shoppers will be looking more and more for convenience as well as for quality and variety in the food items they buy.”\textsuperscript{533} Monsanto noted that more women were looking for convenience in food preparation.\textsuperscript{534} In one discussion of company marketing strategies, Rath’s W.C. Roberts remarked that supermarkets were increasing both their frozen and hot deli meals, looking to break into the growing market for easy mealtimes.\textsuperscript{535}

As a result, the desire to decrease labor intensity became one of the primary marketing tools of many corporations involved in food production. Countless marketing campaigns and advertisements promoted food products as quick and easy to make. Beyond the advent of TV dinners and “instant” products, meat items also underwent image renovation with an emphasis on convenience. Certainly Hormel’s Spam was one of the most prominent foods to embody a sense of quick and versatile meal making. Introduced in 1937, this canned meat eventually became a staple foodstuff for allied troops in World War Two. Despite gaining a reputation as a poor man’s ham, Hormel’s ability to promote the product as a convenient and long-lasting alternative led to its continuous production into the twenty-first century. On a fundamental level, Hormel was able to turn their product into more than just a foodstuff, but an actual commodity in both labor-saving practicality and technical prowess. Spam sold on its ease of use and storage.\textsuperscript{536} Yet,

\textsuperscript{532} Gertrude Bailey, “Speech on Public Relations,” New York Dateline Luncheon meeting of the Executive Committee, April 4, 1963, 6, Series 1, Box 1, File 3, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{534} Monsanto, “Number One of a series Chemistry in the Service of Man: “Your Food and Chemical Research” May 1953, 12-13, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
it was this very connection to practicality that allowed the Hormel product to promote itself as a product of the modern age. Spam’s ability to solve problems (particularly the issues of time management and storage) made it a source of progress. By default then, Hormel assumed its place as the agent of this positive change. The company believed and promoted that it was through their use and control of science and technology that more Americans were able to enjoy the “modern” way of eating. Or as one Hormel advertisement professed, “Hormel products are designed to meet the homemaker’s needs for wholesomeness, freshness and flavor, convenience and variety.”

But Hormel was hardly the only meat processor to tap into this cult of convenience and its connection to modernization. Rath Packing Company also made it a point to focus on convenience and the corporatization of science. Many campaigns emphasized the quick preparation of Rath products. One campaign scheduled in Texas during the spring of 1950 advertised, “meaty, marvelous sausage…in 3 minutes,” accompanied by a comic showcasing Rath’s versatile nature. Another promotion in 1967 made a point to push retailers to display more Rath products in high traffic areas to showcase its shelf stability. In a campaign closer to home, Rath salesmen in Iowa emphasized the theme of “easy suppers” made with Rath meats. Throughout the years, Rath made a strong point to underscore simple preparation and easy storage as essential elements of their products.

Another key feature was the emphasis on the complete utility of Rath products. The company maintained that its packing process made their meat uniquely practical and adaptable

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537 Hormel, “Product Lines,” 1971-1972, 1, Series 1, Box 1, File 43, Rath Packing Company Records.
because it was completely consumable. Rath often touted its exacting trimming standards, “vacuum-sealed” packing methods, and even its “inject-o-cure” device for delivering a flavorful but completely useable product.\(^5\) Easy preparation meant that the housewife would not waste time trimming or de-boning the product. Rath believed this premise of a “waste-free” item to be a strong marketing scheme, one that would increase sales for the company and retailers alike. One promotion leaflet argued that the “housewife enjoys every bite she buys of this waste-free product.” Profit, for the company, the retailer, and the customer all centered on food efficiency. The ability to combat wastefulness made less time and labor spent on preparation, making it an innate component of convenience.

Yet, perhaps one of the more difficult elements of this marketing of convenience was its elusive nature. It is clear that many companies spent a considerable amount of time and money trying to puzzle out an exact definition and what customers’ requirements were. Like taste, perceptions of convenience are fluid and vague, often molding to specific experiences in time and place. For meat, convenience often had a contentious relationship with notions of freshness. An organic material like meat has a rapid decomposition rate, making different preservation methods a critical component in taste. As such, the difference between canning, curing, salting, drying, and freezing was a major choice that all processors faced. Though technology often influenced what forms of preservation the packers chose, customer tastes also reshaped these methods.

One problem the pork packer Rath consistently had to confront was the negative association between canning and freshness. In the past, much of Rath’s success had come

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through their sales of canned meat. When frozen foods became more and more popular in the postwar era (especially as refrigerators and freezers became more advanced and widespread), canned foods faced a growing negative response. Even during the company’s peak years of the forties and fifties, Rath was well aware of this emerging problem in their process. As early as the spring of 1955, the company’s marketing firm, Earle Ludgin & Company, warned Rath that the majority of housewives preferred frozen to canned.542 Other product testing also indicated a similar trend among tested customers. One experimental product demonstration showed that, “people liked canned for convenience and frozen for better ‘homemade’ flavor.”543 Reading the writing on the wall, Rath began to move some of its production towards frozen processed meats.

Even as Rath moved towards frozen foods, that too presented problems for the pork packer. Facing a decrease in sales (probably due to inadequate hog production levels and changing customer tastes), Rath launched an exploratory study to define existing attitudes towards processed meats in the late fifties. The study started with a simple interview session with eight groups of housewives and later their husbands. While the preliminary results showed a number of varying opinions, the most striking feature was disparate gendered attitudes towards acceptable meals. Both groups agreed that the presence of a male breadwinner constituted a “family meal,” which meant that frozen processed meats were fundamentally unacceptable. The interviewed men were especially forthright this assertion. Interviewers observed that these men believed frozen pot pies and casseroles to be primarily “women’s food.” Researchers remarked that these men really did expect their wives “to spend a certain amount of time in the kitchen putting some efforts into the preparation of his meal. They laced their comments with such

expressions as: ‘The lord and master.’ Big deal!” The women interviewed also echoed a similar expectation. Research indicated that the women felt that their husbands deserved “something better than packaged left-overs with a commercial, restaurant flavor when he comes home after a day's work.” The women openly admitted to feelings of guilt when serving such a meal.

On the other hand, the interviewed women were not willing to completely abandon frozen prepared meats as a meal option. They pointed out the products’ serviceable nature for snacks or lunches, especially when the husband was not present. In general, the women agreed that the frozen meats were more convenient and quick to make, but considered them to have an overall poorer taste. Finally, unlike their husbands (who both the interviewers and women described as “fussy”), these housewives believe that frozen pre-made meats could be used at family meals during emergencies or special situations. They expressed the need for tolerance from men, particularly during heavy house cleaning or social events. It was a feeling that seemed to confirm a fundamental contradiction of the postwar era, the class focus on convenient consumption conflicting with the reality of gendered expectations. Promises of quick meals clashed with cultural assumptions about the place of men and women in society. Though technology claimed to help women, the promised reality was less assured. It was a complex issue that Rath and other meat packers needed to evaluate in their quest to increase sale numbers.

Some companies found their processing methods lent themselves well to marketing convenience as an innate quality of their product. Unlike Rath which struggled to keep up with

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546 Ibid, 5-6.
consumer demands, Perdue’s poultry processing made the company’s leap into new markets rather painless and led to a period of economic growth for the poultry industry in general. One observer suggested that the revolutionary development came from a fundamental change in shipping and handling. Before the Second World War, processors would often ship live birds or “New York” dressed (dead poultry with attached heads, feet, and entrails) chickens to city centers, where they would be bought and sold by local butchers. The movement towards full evisceration by processors was expensive but resulted in, “convenience and freshness, as well as sanitation and other considerations.”547 These other considerations also included the rise of branding and a focus on self-service. The prepackaging of poultry vastly changed the power dynamics between processors and butchers. The shipment of full birds meant that butchers controlled the flow of the market and their shops were the nexus points of choice. Housewives came and stipulated the cuts they wanted, allowing butchers to cut the birds to their specifications. Once prepackaged cuts came on the market, butchers were robbed of their primary role, regulated to being the middle-man in the cold chain. Branding, rather than butchering, was the principal source of choice, one that centered on the processors.548

Poultry packers like Perdue used this processing method to emphasize the convenience and freshness of their products. To drive this point home, the company advertised their cold packing and shipping as key to keeping the chicken fresh and convenient for awaiting customers. Perdue touted its large ice-making machines, remarking, “The ice is carefully chipped and shaved to the proper size. First the tender young golden-yellow color chickens are chilled to 34

degrees—never frozen, of course.” The cold packed chicken then saved housewives the time it took to defrost frozen meats. Cold but non-frozen meat offered a sense of preserved freshness without the hassle or taste aversion of other methods. The ability to provide cold but non-frozen poultry was one aspect of the company’s media blitz when entering the New York market. In a letter to Food Chief Supermarkets, CEO Frank Perdue noted that his company, “just commenced our first TV advertising of what we believe to be the finest fresh, ice-pack poultry product sold in the New York Metropolitan area.” Another advisor argued that the company should tell the “honest” story of the processor’s cold chain, highlighting their ability to bring in fresh chicken in a convenient way. This connection between cold packing and customer convenience was also used by Rath Packing, though to much less success.

Of course, marketing convenience was not just about the physical reality of less labor, but the hypothetical benefits of saving that all-important middle-class trait, free time. Corporations involved in all aspects of the food industry marketed their products as innately tied to greater possibilities of leisure and personal improvement. One Monsanto publication maintained that chemicals made food more stable and preparation much easier, taking the guesswork out of cooking. In turn, the modern housewife was able to have a “well-rounded” personality and more free time to pursue outside interests. The company’s research then made, “the job of being mother and housewife a lot easier, and the results more fun for her and her healthier family.” International Harvester also promoted its appliances as leisure making possibilities, remarking

552 Monsanto, “Number One of a series Chemistry in the Service of Man: Your Food and Chemical Research,” May 1953, 10-11, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
that their refrigerators made it easier for housewives to store more food. Thus, housewives could spend less time shopping and more on other family-centered activities.553

One of the major elements of this time saving consumption was the growth of the shopping mall. These new shopping centers of the postwar era promised greater accessibility, and with that, an innate source of convenient comfort. On a physical level, the development of the shopping center changed the environmental impact of shopping forever. The most obvious difference was the shift from urban spaces to suburban “centers.” These carefully planned spaces “brought the market to the people,” allowing suburbanites a convenient source of consumption without the hassle of travel to the city. Ample parking space, a litany of stores, longer hours, and carefully segmented spaces all appealed to a population shopping more frequently as a form of leisure. Of course, shopping centers also appealed to suburbanites not just because of what they offered but also what (or whom) they kept out. Unsavory elements of urbanization were seemingly eliminated. Retailers deliberately chose to exclude unwelcome segments of the population, including the underclass and racial minorities, from these centers by virtue of location. Building these shopping centers within new suburban areas, zones that purposefully prohibited people of color, retailers only added to the racial divide over accessibility. Therefore, ease of access and the comfort of quick consumption (with the understanding that these would lead to more free time) became yet another talisman of who could join in the consumer’s republic of the postwar era and who could not.554

But perhaps more important than the physical change of the shopping center was its conceptual embodiment of middle-class identity. Shopping centers became important areas for

554 Cohen, Consumers’ Republic, 257-287.
Americans to perform their identity through observed consumption. Those who could afford to venture to these centers could establish their place as consumers, partaking in shared patterns of buying and selling. Shoppers who bought goods at these centers seemed to enjoy the convenience of easy access and then, presumably, enjoy more free time. Easy consumption was a comfort given to those who could afford to attain it. It was just that the price of admission was higher for some. Stores at these new shopping centers deliberately situated themselves to appeal to a middle-class clientele, not just in location, but in mindset. One scholar suggested that social stratification was one of the most important influences on buying behavior.\textsuperscript{555} Another observed that since 1940, the leveling of incomes had encouraged department stores to appeal more and more to the middle class.\textsuperscript{556} Marketer Pierre Martineau noted that class identification played a critical role in the customer choice of store:

> The most important function of retail advertising today, when prices and quality have become so standard, is to permit the shopper to make social-class identification. This she can do from the tone and physical character of the advertising. Of course, there is also the factor of psychological identification. Two people in the same social class may want different stores. One may prefer a conservative store, one may want the most advanced styling. But neither will go to stores where they do not "fit," in a social-class sense.\textsuperscript{557} 

What was revealing about these shopping centers and the performance of identity was not so much how they were based around actual income, but rather perceptions of what the middle class wanted. New shopping areas were meant to ease the time and labor burden on women, thus

creating more chances to enjoy other hobbies. But these shopping centers also looked to offer leisure opportunities for the whole family, thus keeping potential customers close even as they promoted themselves as convenient shopping areas.

Leisure time was also another point of emphasis for a lot of company-funded educational shorts and other commercials based around kitchen appliances. In 1956, General Motors’ Frigidaire division published the “Kitchen of Tomorrow,” a short ten-minute film that demonstrated the company’s vision of what future food preparation would look like when using corporate products. Featuring a long-legged and lithe housewife dancing around a kitchen that performed all the necessary tasks for her (including choosing and cooking the meals), the convenient technology of Frigidaire’s “push-button magic” allowed the happy housewife to “be free around the clock,” enjoying tennis, golf, and sunbathing. Nearly ten years later, their rival Ford Motor Company and their appliance division, also produced an industrial film on the future of the American household, titled “1999 A.D.” Ford predicted that a domestic network of computers would effectively control all household needs, including meal preparation and cleaning. Without the laborious tasks in the kitchen, this housewife of future was able to spend more time shopping, looking after her children, and enjoying hobbies like pottery and music. Ford remarked that this house of the future represented a society “rich in leisure and taken for granted comforts.” These films were not just flights of fantasy for corporations, despite some of their outlandish predictions (including a “home-health” couch that diagnosed health problems and a fish bowl oven that quickly whipped delicious baked goods). Each short made critical connections between the future, convenience, and corporatization. After all, it was corporate

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production of technology that created this possibility. Their control was central to creating this utopian world, one that freed humans from labor while still allowing them to enjoy the comforts of a techno-futuristic world.

The ability to ease labor burdens and create a comfortable existence represented an opportunity for agribusinesses to solidify their place in all aspects of the industry. Just as tractor manufacturers’ touted the effortless nature of their implements in the field, so too did appliance makers and meat packers exploit desires for easy meal preparation in the domestic household. The postwar emphasis on consumerism and the middle-class lifestyle made “convenience” an attractive vector for corporate marketing. Finally, corporate constructions of history and techno-futurism once again emphasized the role of companies to bring about a better tomorrow. Meat packers attempted to show how their products brought the speed, simplicity, and freshness of the future to present. Monsanto, International Harvester, and other businesses involved in appliance manufacturing, food preservation, and storage argued a similar theme.

**Affording Convenience: Price Drive**

Of course, a decrease in labor time and effort was not the only aspect of convenience that attracted marketers and housewives alike. Though a booming economy increased household income for many Americans, it remained clear that product cost was integral part of buying and selling. Numerous academic articles testified to the continued influence of “price drive” in the market place. In fact, several researchers discovered that money-saving products seemed to have a greater effect on the choices of the more affluent. One study in particular observed that the members of the middle class placed much greater importance on price within the buying

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decision than lower-income customers.\textsuperscript{561} No doubt this was in part due to the greater variety of brand choices afforded to customers who could shop at supermarkets and shopping centers.

However, this hyper-importance placed on the cost of the product was more than just a response to physical location. Instead, price reflected a critical component of middle class identity. Low cost of foodstuffs allowed families to transfer priorities from basic necessities (like food) to luxuries that invoked their socio-economic status. Price drive was more significant to the shoppers of the middle class because other consumption defined their lifestyle. Household capital once spent on everyday provisions could now cover a second car, summer camp for children, or a new television set. In essence, low food cost set in motion other elements of consumerism. Convenience in food then defined not just labor intensity, but the capital investment in general.\textsuperscript{562}

Therefore, like saving time and energy, part of this cult of convenience became focused on price savings as an inherent part of the middle class lifestyle. Hoping to lure in discerning customers, companies marketed low-prices as an essential part of a convenient product. Just as convenience saved the housewife from excess labor burdens, so too would it save the whole family money to be spent on other, more enjoyable things. Cheap but hearty products promised to provide healthy food without breaking the bank. Companies involved in food processing maintained that this paradox, this convenience of “inexpense,” was possible because of corporate actions and methods. It was corporatization then that allowed customers to enjoy these savings.

Food prices in America have changed drastically over the last century, with industry developments, increased mechanization, and federal policy (among other factors) influencing


\textsuperscript{562} Cohen, \textit{A Consumer’s Republic}, 111-166.
price point. High agricultural production and a lack of intense domestic crises, like civil war, have insured a stable supply of needed foodstuffs. But more than that, federal policy has undergirded a system that assured low food prices for the masses. Progressive reformers created the Country Life Commission of 1908 in part to guarantee an adequate food supply for a growing American population. During the Great Depression, federal relief agencies worked to bring low cost food to millions (even as the USDA and other agricultural services looked to increase farm incomes by decreasing oversupply). The First and the Second World War led to a drastic increase in federal oversight over food and fiber, attempting to feed a warring nation without shortchanging either its civilian or military populations. But it was the fight over consumerism and price controls in the 1940s that truly defined the rest of century. Despite withdrawing from overt market regulation with the end of the Office of Price Administration in 1946, the government nevertheless supported a system that supplied low-cost food to the American people. 

While inflation has clearly increased costs (after all, a loaf of bread that once cost 5¢ in 1913 now averages $2.40), most Americans have enjoyed relatively low prices for their food. This was especially apparent after the Second World War. In spite of federal deregulation, families spent less of their income on food than their parents or grandparents. In 1901, for instance, the average family spent over forty two percent of their annual revenue on food. During the Great Depression, food expenditures remained high (33.6%). In contrast, 

567 Ibid, 15-16.
household income allocated for food decreased to its lowest point yet by 1965, with families spending just twenty four percent on food. For the first time, Americans expended more of their income on housing and accompaniments than food for the table.\textsuperscript{568} Today, these numbers are even more striking. Between 1960 and 2002, the percentage of household income spent on food dropped from 24\% to mere 13.1\%.\textsuperscript{569} Moreover, as income increased, the household capital percentage spent on food fell significantly.\textsuperscript{570} In general, statisticians of the Bureau of Labor calculated that in a year Americans spent only fifty percent of their income on basic necessities, down from nearly eighty percent at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{571}

Companies were well aware of these changes in the market and the appeal of price value in food retailing. Both from academic studies and their assessment of the market, major processors and retailers understood that cost could deeply influence the success of a product, even making up for negative associations with taste or flavor. In discussing the burgeoning poultry market in the postwar era, two scholars observed, “Anything that could be offered to the housewife at declining prices, especially when prices of almost everything else were going up, invited its use as a price leader in the retail trade.”\textsuperscript{572} They went on to argue that broiler chickens had assumed a popular image as a “good buy,” leading to greater market expansion.\textsuperscript{573} Marketers echoed a similar perception. When debating possible new products for Perdue, one potential advertising firm mentioned that chicken hot dogs might undercut the beef wiener market. The

\textsuperscript{568} Ibid, 27-28.
\textsuperscript{569} Ibid, 57-58.
\textsuperscript{572} Bernard Tobin and Henry Arthur, “Dynamics of Adjustment In the Broiler Industry,” 26, Box 29, File 293, Perdue Chicken Records.
\textsuperscript{573} Ibid, 26.
important point was to consider, “what women think about the relative price of chicken versus regular hot dogs.”574 Other meat packers also used price as a marketing tool. When trying to drum up more retailers for their beef products, Rath made a special reference to cost-benefit, noting that their products had better value for the customer and the retailer.575 Savings were at the heart of many campaigns as businesses jostled with each other for retail supremacy.

Out of all of the singular tactics and possible modes of tapping into this price-drive market, none proved to be more pervasive or successful than coupons. These simple slips of paper, though existing since the late nineteenth century, increased greatly in popularity after the Second World War. Food manufacturers quickly bought into to their appeal, as they seemed to trigger more sales.576 Rath Packing heavily used coupons throughout their advertising campaigns, especially when introducing their products to new areas or to boost sales in a flagging market.577 During a company sales meeting, Rath justified the use of heavy couponing as expensive but ultimately worth it in the long run: “women like and use coupons. Survey after survey shows that 9 out of 10 women clip coupons. Most of these women end up redeeming their coupons for one simple reason…they represent real cash savings at the time of purchases.”578 This impression of price value was the theme that the company wanted to associate with their products. Though seven cents was a steep cut into profit, Rath believed that coupons, “create an overall bargain value impression for Rath Sliced Meats.”579 Nearly five years later and one

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574 Letter to Frank Perdue from James W. North, February 1, 1971, 4, Box 36, File 406, Perdue Chicken Records.
579 Ibid, 5-6.
thousand miles away, Perdue Chicken also employed a similar marketing scheme. Looking to increase their share of the New York City poultry market, the company saturated the area with an all out marketing campaign. The campaign theme partly centered, “around the ‘money back guarantee’ for its "golden yellow" broilers that are ‘healthier, meatier, and taste better.”

Corporations understood that inexpensive goods were a strong part of buying decision, especially when the consumer believed that they could transfer the monetary value to more desirable commodities. Acknowledging this trend, corporations looked to draw an association between the plethora inexpensive goods and corporate command over the direction of the food system. Companies wanted to draw parallels between their scientific and technological expertise and the ability of Americans to enjoy inexpensive products. As an appliance manufacturer (along with their other implements), International Harvester bragged that, “everything manufactured by our Company enables the user to earn a profit.” Even as Rath struggled to push their products, they honed in on the company’s ability to deliver quality beef in a price-minded market.

Monsanto highlighted their contribution to the “food revolution” in a 1953 series of articles. The company remarked that its research, along with help from farmers and the government, “has brought more and better food to the consumer, at the same time holding down prices.” Each one of these companies placed themselves at the center of this prosperous economy. While not technically connected in direct communication, these businesses were nevertheless linked through their active support of very deliberate and singular vision.

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582 Rath Packing Company, “Profit more with Rath Corn-fed Beef,” circa 1960s, Series 8, Box 6, File 17, Rath Packing Company Records.
583 Monsanto, “Number One of a series Chemistry in the Service of Man: Your Food and Chemical Research,” May 1953, Series 10, Box 2, File 1, Monsanto Collection.
Even non-corporate entities could be used to support this association. Trade groups like the Delmarva Poultry Industry, the American Meat Institute, or the Manufacturing Chemists Association often endorsed this notion of corporate low cost goods. During DPI’s annual chicken festival, the group declared that local industry’s efficiency and production methods allowed for a tasty yet economical bird for everyone.\textsuperscript{584} It was the industry’s assembly-line methods, the group claimed, that let processors to pass on savings to their customers.\textsuperscript{585} The Manufacturing Chemists Association, which included Monsanto, DuPont, and Dow Chemical, also promoted the link between big business and economic convenience. In a booklet entitled “Food Additives: What They Are/How They Are Used,” the chemical association promoted chemical additives as necessary and beneficial to the food system. Along with a focus on easier preparation and storage, better taste and nutrition, and wider variety, the booklet also publicized the ability of chemicals to keep food cost-effective, noting, “Dollars spent for food must be kept in line with other living expenses. This means that, for the most part, food must be mass-produced to keep the price reasonable.”\textsuperscript{586}

Fundamentally, this period in food retail witnessed a startling number of changes that reflected the growing cultural hegemony of the American middle class. The quest for cheaper food increasingly intertwined a public hungry for more consumption with corporations ripe for expansion. Agribusiness viewed inexpensive products as yet another tool in their conquest of the fiber and food industry. By associating their ability to bring cheaper goods to the market with

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{584} Delmarva Poultry Industry, “Delmarva Chicken Festival Pamphlet,” Georgetown, 1954, 2, Box 1, File 7, Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc. Records.
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scientific advancement, these corporations tapped into a new age of food and consumerism in America.

**The Lynchpin: Quality Assurance in an Age of Convenience**

Yet, all of these various aspects of convenience hinged on one all-important assumption: an expectation of continued quality *despite* these changes. The cult of convenience only worked when the products still delivered the things that customers desired, namely taste, flavor, quality, and the ever present yet vague sense of “wholesomeness.” Convenience then needed to deliver on the promised benefits of speed, ease of use, and inexpense without losing those other traits. To be exact, the convenient food also needed to taste good. Otherwise, all those amenities meant little. If a housewife made a cake with speed and efficiency (quickly enough to allow her to enjoy other pursuits) but the cake tasted poorly or lacked for quality, convenience failed the customer. Agribusinesses needed to demonstrate that their products met the customers’ expectation of quality. This was the lynchpin in the cult of convenience, the connection that held together all of these different strands.

Fortunately for agribusinesses, the all-encompassing theme of convenience fit neatly with the corporate promotion of their control of science and technology. These companies argued that their products could essentially “have it all” because they harnessed the power of scientific progress to solve the inconvenience of the past. Much like their attempts to woo farmers, companies involved in food processing also publicized how corporate expertise over scientific research and methods created products that retained the best elements of the past with added convenience of speed, economical price, and leisure. By engaging in research and development, agribusinesses insinuated that they eliminated the imperfect variables of food preparation, including unwanted drudgery and time wastefulness, to create a perfect blend of good food and
convenient living. Just as farmers could expect a perfectly controlled environment to grow crops, so too could housewives enjoy a food system that made it easier to buy, store, and make delicious and nutritious food for their families. In effect, these companies suggested that private institutions (specifically their institution) brought the future to the present, once again reflecting the ability of businesses to advance human existence and solve the problems of humanity.

Retaining quality and efficient production was a critical theme of many advertising campaigns. Numerous companies promoted their products as fundamentally high quality. As one advertising firm put it, most companies, “try to create an umbrella of quality built around their ‘name,’ ‘A tradition of quality’, ‘The most trusted name in Meat’.” But the definition of quality tended to be vague and difficult to fully describe. Though price was also an important factor in perceptions of quality, studies of the time showed that connection between cost and quality was not necessarily linear. In fact, the association between a certain product and the perception of “high-quality” relied on many different factors. When discussing strategies for marketing their canned hams, Rath’s advertising firm (Earle Ludgin & Company) maintained that consumers continually sought reassurance of quality through product traits of leanness, tenderness, and lack of fat or gristle. The firm believed that these attributes provided a strong direction for the company’s overall strategy. James W. North, Vice President of Client Services for the advertising firm of Al Lefton, told Frank Perdue that chicken already possessed high level of quality acceptance from customers. He noted that, “Chicken can stand on its own. It's a food of recognized quality.” Chicken, unlike other kinds of meat commodities, benefited

590 Letter to Frank Perdue from James W. North, February 1, 1971, Box 36, File 406, Perdue Chicken Records.
from a historic legacy of exclusivity, reserved for only special occasions. Pork, on the other hand, had to work to overcome the stigma of poverty and disease.591

Sometimes corporate processors preferred to showcase the quality of their products by heralding the superiority of their stock. Rath Packing constantly promoted the preeminence of their cattle and hogs, claiming that they only bought the best stock available.592 Early on, the company used their location in the state of Iowa as evidence of quality insurance. Looking to associate regional fetishism with innate quality, Rath used Iowa and the tagline “Land’O’Corn” to suggest the superiority stock of their meat products.593 Later on, the company would move away from this theme to suggest a more uniform quality based solely on their tradename. Due to their diversification and acquisition of smaller regional firms, Rath’s new advertising firm, Gardner Advertising Company, advised the company to use simple statement like, “if it weren't as good as our hams, we wouldn't put our name on it” for acquired products with different brand names. They insisted that dropping the “Land’O’Corn” and focusing simply on Rath would capitalize on and reinforce uniform quality.594 Rath was not the only packer to suggest this theme. Many other companies, including Hormel, Swift, Armour, and Wilson also used this claim. Hormel argued that the, “heritage of the Hormel Company has been based upon strict adherence to quality. From the very beginning, George A. Hormel's major concern was that

591 The perception of pork has changed a great deal in the twentieth century. Once the most popular meat in America, namely for animal’s feed conversion rate, pork faced declining demand from the 1930s to the 1980s. Some feared disease, such as trichinosis. Others disliked the passing connection between hogs and poverty, a historical association that identified pork with the urban poor. Still others found pork difficult to cook, leading to overcooked and tough meals. Consumption of pork only increased in America by the 1980s. See Jenny Barker-Devine, On Behalf of the Family Farm, 113-137; Sam White, “From Globalized Pig Breeds to Capitalist Pigs,” 94-120.  
592 Rath Packing Company, “Deluxe Rath 4-H Show Beef Ad,” Springfield Massachusetts, circa 1950s, Series 1, Box 1, File 2, Rath Packing Company Records.  
quality be built into each product.” Superior meat, especially in connection to a company’s personal history or superior animal production, was one avenue to showcase innate quality.

Another marketed characteristic of “high-quality” meat that many corporations used was the concept of flavor and taste. Clearly, flavor was a critical part of any successful food commodity. Yet, there was no guide to determine what the consumer wanted, and what they did not. As a result, companies and researchers spent a great deal of time and effort to determine customers’ taste. Unfortunately, just like conceptions of freshness, taste tended to be difficult to accurately measure. J.O. Eastlack, the research director for Duncan Foods Company, remarked that communicating flavors was the most difficult research problem. However, this vagueness did not stop meat packers from developing flavor as a key part of their advertising. Oscar Meyer launched their “sack o’sauce” product with the tag line “fresh cooked flavor,” promising to add distinctive flavoring to their canned meat. Armour franks promised an “open-fire” flavor even when boiled. By the late 1950s, Rath decided to move away from the regional focus towards an explicit emphasis on flavor. During a review of their ham advertising, the analysis noted that their hickory smoked flavor had recently become a major point of difference. It continued, “During the years that followed, the creative approach evolved into discussions of leanness and quality, with holiday-oriented serving suggestions. Gradually the strategy evolved into one of exploiting the flavor concept with some tendency back to the product benefits.” Eventually, the emphasis on flavor moved beyond canned ham to other company products. For the 1973 fiscal year, Rath began to use hickory smoke to market their bacon. Company advertisers

595 Hormel, “Product Lines,” 1971-1972, 10, Series 1, Box 1, File 43, Rath Packing Company.
described their primary marketing objective was to, “Exploit and advertise hickory smoking as a basic product difference of Rath bacon. Promote hickory smoking as the end benefit for better flavored bacon.”\footnote{Earle Ludgin & Company, “Rath Hickory Smoked Bacon Advertising Plan for October 1972-September 1973,” June 1972, Series 8, Box 22, File 1, Rath Packing Company Records.} Even when companies already had another point of stress, flavor was a difficult theme to abandon. In the late 1960s, Frank Perdue commented that the company had been advised to remove the word healthy as a feature in favor of the flavor. While “healthy” seemed like a strong point of emphasis for poultry, advertisers had warned Perdue about the possible unwanted connection between health and disease. Therefore, flavor seemed like a better option.\footnote{Letter to Tom Robinson from Frank Perdue, November 4, 1970, Box 29, File 300, Perdue Chicken Records.}

Whatever the theme that meat packers decided to use (superior stock, flavor, taste, etc) to prove quality, all buttressed their arguments by connecting these conveniences with corporate use of science and technology. The meat industry projected an image of scientific expertise and technological control, demonstrating how they had tapped in to scientific research to create convenient yet still wholesome meals. Every step of the process, from breeding and feeding, to handling and packaging, seemed designed to increase the convenience of the customer. DPI bragged about their ability to improve poultry quality through science:

From scientifically bred baby chicks, the Delmarva peninsula sends you high quality birds, marketed at the tender age of ten weeks. Confined in large, modern houses, fed a well-balance diet and grown with care, these chickens provide you with a high quality, low cost protein meat. Prepared for market in modern processing plants, our chickens are rushed to you daily in large refrigerated trucks.\footnote{“Georgetown Delmarva Chicken Festival Pamphlet,” June 21-23, 1954, 3-4, Box 1, File 7, Delmarva Chicken Industry Records.}
One of DPI’s major contributors, Perdue Chicken, constantly linked the quality of their birds to their modern production process. In one radio commercial, the company boasted, “The controlled Perdue broiler quality is absolutely consistent and the finest in the industry--why? Because Perdue controls the diet, housing, health and environment of their beautiful laying flocks--the quality eggs produced are hatched in their own modern, scientific hatcheries.”

Another advertisement claimed that Perdue’s chickens were “pampered,” growing up in a scientifically controlled environment that guaranteed a tasty product. Corporate control ensured that poultry reached a high level of quality and met the needs of customers.

Other companies, both those involved in poultry production and others concerned with beef, pork, lamb, and other meat commodities, also looked to project a similar correlation. Rath associated the innate quality of their lamb products with their funding of 4-H, FFA, and other vocational agriculture projects. The Waterloo business argued that their continued support of academic advancements at the high school and collegiate level (along with their development of transportation and advanced processing methods) encouraged more profitable and marketable commodities. When introducing a new boiled canned ham product, Rath guaranteed the quality (“plenty of flavor”) and convenience (leaness with no waste) by highlighting their various technical methods of processing. The packer claimed that the boiled hams were, “genuine because these muscles are trimmed to 1/8 on the outside and completely defatted internally.” Later they maintained, “Rath's double cure guarantees plenty of flavor too. First, "inject-o-cure" insures the hams carry our famous flavor clear to their very center. Then hams are

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603 Rath Packing Company, “This is Farmarama…Profitable Livestock Production and Marketing Pamphlet,” circa late 1950s, Series 5, Box 3, File 16, Rath Packing Company Records.
placed in vats to further cure.” The key to this was proving that the trifecta of quality, convenience, and science was completely predicated on corporate scientific research and technical expertise. Each one of these terms highlighted the company’s scientific ability, their knowledge working to bring the consumer what they wanted.

**Golden Hue: Quality Defined by Color**

Out of all these meat processors, none utilized the correlation between quality and corporate science better than Perdue. Their successful application of the cult of convenience, with its emphasis on their company’s proficiency in science and technology, allowed them to outpace many competitors and expand their hold over the east coast poultry market. While Tyson may have produced of a greater range of poultry products and Pilgrim (a rival poultry company out of Texas) expanded the scope of their operations through acquisitions, this Delmarva area company grew rapidly through smart marketing choices and a drive to capitalize on changing customer tastes. Perhaps the best example of Perdue’s success was their employment of this marketing strategy to win a dog fight in the most competitive market in America, New York City.

The Big Apple represented a unique situation in the commodity market of America. Clearly desirable for its population, potential revenue, and connection to Wall Street, the city’s tight and expensive quarters made the turn to mega-stores and one-stop-shopping difficult. Moreover, the city’s distinct ethnic neighborhoods and their tendency to frequent specialty food stores further proved resistant. The city’s butchers, deeply connected to their neighborhoods through their shops, still retained much of the agency that their occupational brethren had lost years before to industrial meat packers. This meant that processors had to court local stores.

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Even processing methods (New York dressed evisceration) placed control of the actual dismemberment in the hands of the local butchers, who then listened to the customer and cut the poultry according to their wishes. This interaction between local butcher and local consumer was the sovereign point of exchange, one over which corporations had very little control. If Perdue wanted to succeed in this market, their marketing scheme had to both address the wider consumer desires and break into this interchange.605

Perdue cracked this market with a well-timed media blitz and a perfect representation of their corporate superiority through the promotion of their birds, golden-yellow hue. This deceptively simple theme, a mere color change made possible by feed additives (marigold petals to be exact), proved to be incredibly successful. The color change made the company’s perceived distinction possible on a theoretical and material level. The difference between Perdue’s golden birds and other poultry was easy to spot, so much so that it became a consistent theme in their advertisements.606 On a metaphysical level, the golden hue was a symbol of innate superiority. One advertisement argued that color was, “built on quality,” and that, “when it comes to healthful, tasty nutritious food for your family, quality is always your best bargain.”607 Perdue advertised that not all chicken was the same and that their poultry’s hue indicated “wholesome, plump, tender built-in quality!”608 It was here that the lines between the conceptual (quality) and the physical (golden color) became blurred. If customer could literally see the difference, it could possibly bind the association between the company and product quality. No wonder Perdue

told customers to, “insist on golden-yellow Perdue quality. Perhaps your store will get the quality message to meet your quality demand!”

It was this demand and its consequences that moved the Perdue’s golden hue from a simple scheme to a marketing revolution. Perdue was hardly the first poultry company to try to associate their specific birds with high quality. Long before Perdue launched its campaign in New York City, several Maine poultry firms managed to command high prices for their quality control. However, product differentiation had not allowed these firms much leverage over sellers. This, combined with the evisceration process and New York’s powerful local butchers, placed the agency of choice away from the corporations. But Perdue’s marketing campaign changed all of that. Despite resistance from some butchers, more customers began to demand Perdue specifically. A company questionnaire, completed by 58 Queens butchers, showed that, “The single thing that seems to impress the housewife the most is the advertising.” The butchers noted that housewives had favorable comments Perdue’s taste, bulk, and especially color. More anecdotal evidence from individual surveys suggested a similar conclusion, even to the annoyance of local shop owners. Dominick Falletti, a shop owner from Queens, noted that, “Sometimes women will come in and ask for Perdue but never tell me why they like it.” Another butcher off handedly commented that local housewives just depended on their butchers to sell them the best, but still admitted that some explicitly asked for Perdue. The owner of Charles Prime Meat Market disclosed that Perdue advertising changed customer demand. He

remarked, “Women see all the ads and then come in my store and want to see the Perdue wing tag before they buy a chicken. If it don't say Perdue--they not buy.”

This customer response fundamentally changed the interaction between firms, sellers, and customers, effectively removing much of the power of local shops and turning them into a middleman between the supplier and the consumer. Butchers resisted the use of “tags”—branding labels—because it both inconvenienced them and removed their power to control what birds were sold to customers. Some early poultry companies had tried to develop a similar branding, only to fail when retailers would simply remove identification. But Perdue’s media campaign had made that tactic impossible. Customer demand for Perdue products required that shop owners procure those birds, and the golden hue made it difficult to disguise anything else as the healthy, tasty Delmarva poultry.

Certainly this pressure to meet new consumer desires made for disgruntled butchers. One member of Miller Bros. shop complained about Perdue’s advertising, “All the time it's crammed down their throat Perdue--Perdue--Perdue, till now people think it's the only chicken on the market!” The owner of Galante’s Butcher Shop Food Market explained that housewives believed newspaper advertising and forced him to sell Perdue. This was confirmed by another owner, who acknowledged, “with all the ads in the paper and radio it would be hard to sell anything without a Perdue wing tag. Women demand Perdue!” Some butchers were especially put out by the swelling demand and the changes required to meet it. The owner of Stock’s

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Market went so far as to experiment with Perdue’s tags and see if it was the advertising or the innate quality of the meat that made the difference

I don't understand it--my customers rave to me about the wonderful Perdue chickens--yet I put a few Perdue tags on Rabinowitz and the same women still telling me how good that Perdue chicken was! It has got to be the advertising; there is just no other explanation.

Me, I don't think there was a difference between Perdue and Rabinowitz, that's why I made the test.619

Obvious difference or not, the proof was in the (marigold) petals. New York women brought Perdue’s chicken by the truck full. By the fall of the next year, even radio stations that ran Perdue commercials began receiving calls demanding to know where to buy the golden chicken.620

The key to making this marketing tactic work was to advertise Perdue’s processing methods as uniquely scientific and advanced, allowing the company to deliver convenience to the customer. To put it simply, the company had to make people believe that Perdue poultry was exceptional, that their process, based on scientific inquiry and technical capability, is what made it possible to have tasty and easy to cook birds. The company advertised that their employees were “fussy” about their broilers and that their product was the most consistent and superior chicken on the market because of the scientifically-controlled environment of their flocks.621 In a letter to potential retailers, Frank Perdue insisted that their “scientifically-formulated diets” made a money-back guarantee for sellers.622 So when the company rhetorically asked customers what the golden-color meant to them, the company answered its own question by stating, “It means a

pampered chicken that was scientifically fed computer-formulated feeds containing only highly nutritious ingredients. It means that most wholesome, tastiest chicken available today--that golden-yellow color means freshness, ice-packed freshness unequalled--”623 It was the emphasis on corporate science that was the lynchpin between quality and convenience. Perdue claimed that they (and only they) could deliver on the taste customers wanted with the ease they expected. It came as no surprise then when describing Perdue advertising scheme, one New York City merchandising director implied a revolutionary change in the merchandising of chicken.624

The Failure of Fun: Rath Wieners

Not all companies shared the same success as Perdue and their entry into the New York market. Other companies, in particular pork packers like Rath, struggled to project a similar connection between their products, the cult of convenience, and their control of the scientific process. Rath failed to increase the sale of their wieners by the mid-1960s. Trying to cash in on the growing hot dog market, Rath spent a number of years attempting to win over customers by concentrating on product superiority and quality. Unfortunately, by 1966, company advertisers began to acknowledge that, “there is no meaningful product advantage for one brand of wieners over another.”625 Sales numbers quickly showed that proposing quality based on corporate scientific research was not a viable marketing strategy. Instead, corporate studies showed a growing influence of children on brand selection.626

Even when Rath attempted to attract children to their product, they failed to successfully entice them with corporate scientific prowess. Adopting a strategy that melded humor, health,
and current kid interests, the company looked to appeal to children through the lens of “fun food” and to their mothers by emphasizing “the nutritious value of Rath wieners as an integral part of good health food.”627 To achieve this, Rath hatched a number of different advertising promotions, commercials, and other marketing schemes with “Indians” as a major branding point because, the “Indians theme ties in well with Rath and kids find Indians exciting and fun.”628 Some Rath brainstorming ideas never materialized, including a plan to publish a series of comics or developing packs of “Indian” trading cards.629 But other ploys to connect Rath with this dual conception of health and humor did emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s. First, the company contracted a commercial spot and “Indian Joke Contest” (which featured a bank of distasteful and racist jokes) on a popular children’s television program, “The Floppy Show.” After reminding its viewers to keep eating Rath, Floppy the dog would reiterate that the company’s wieners, “helps you run and jump all day. You’re a winner every time you eat.”630

This play on nutrition symbolized a real attempt to tie Rath to strength and well-being, showing that quality was an innate part of the company’s products and the development process. Other promotions promised kids “energy all day long,” and their mothers that they would be serving, “real good, wholesome Rath meat.”631 One commercial featured a “Beatles-like” quartet of Indians playing guitars and singing, “Eat Rath wieners, come on strong. Heap big energy all

629 Ibid; Letter to William Jenner from Michael Devlin, April 13, 1966, Series 8, Box 6, File 1, Rath Packing Company Records.
631 Rath Packing Company, “Rath Blackhawk Wieners Indian Promotion Fact Sheet,” 1966, Series 8, Box 6, File 1, Rath Packing Company Records.
The company emphasized that they did not want to characters to be “old-fashioned” but rather young, hip, and in line with current kid interests. By reconceiving the Rath trademark in a modern, youthful way, the meat packer hoped to appeal to their audience’s need for strength and health. But the marketing ploy ultimately failed, leaving the company back at square one.

For other products, Rath’s desire to connect to a “wholesome” image hindered their projection of scientific quality. By the early 70s, the company was struggling in a number of different ways. Uneven pork production, increasingly tense labor disputes, and outdated equipment made the operations at the company more difficult as the years went on. Another added concern was failure of the company’s marketing strategies. Having lost out on the wiener market earlier, Rath found that their canned hams were losing out on the open market. Part of this was due to generational and taste changes. Business data showed that canned hams were unpopular among younger couples. Market research showed that their best customers tended to be older, with either a college education or skilled trade, and lived in smaller cities.

However, it was Rath’s full reliance on wholesomeness as a sales tactic that also proved to be ineffectual. This was particularly the case for Rath’s Hickory Smoked “Picnics.” Instead of invoking a positive aura of physical and moral well-being, “Picnics” failed to generate a wholesome sense of value because of their price. As one marketing report revealed, “Our inability to establish "quality" in the minds of the consumer because they carries the name picnic which is synonymous with low price.”

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632 Rath Packing Company, “Rath Indian TV Spot Scene Board,” 1966, Series 8, Box 6, File 1, Rath Packing Company Records.
wholesome food, did not easily associate with advanced scientific methods. Rath needed to make customers think that they were essential because of their ability to contribute tasty food in a convenient manner.

Rath consistently failed to adequately gauge what their customers wanted out of their food. Falling sales in wieners and canned hams were only the tip of the iceberg, as the product sales trends implied a long term stagnation and decline in many of their markets. One employee blamed the company’s failure to modernize: “In my opinion, this is a true result of not keeping modern giving these individual situations enough attention from that viewpoint. We are not only missing growth opportunities, but our business is being taken over by competition.” A year later, board member D.G. Waterous implied a similar contention, “I have long felt that the [n]ew products Committee of Rath takes a frightfully pessimistic view toward new product development.” He argued that the company should try and spend more on modern products because these they were the “life blood” of most business. Yet, many company activities indicate just that. As early as the mid-1950s, Rath undertook several studies to understand the desires of the modern consumer. The meat packer sent out questionnaires to target markets, had employees attend seminars on sensory testing, and created (and tested) dozens of new products. In many ways, Rath did everything right. They foresaw a problem and took necessary steps to try to correct it. Using the information processor Market Fact, Inc., Rath looked to train its employees to translate customer desires into new products. The company

noted, “An approach to developing new products or product modifications is to find the benefits that consumers, or a segment of consumers, want in a product. The market researcher must learn to describe consumer wants in consumer language.” Yet, for all these actions, Rath never really learned how to speak the language of convenience.

In the end, these campaigns failed for many reasons (fickle consumer taste, production levels, poorly conceived promotions) but most of all, because they lacked clarity. Rath tried to hit too many targets at once and therefore ended up missing them all. They could not establish quality for their child or homemaker audience, they failed to showcase any sense of convenience, and did not emphasize their scientific expertise and technical ability in bring these products to an increasingly modern consumer. Whereas Perdue was able to attach quality and convenience to their scientific methods through their golden-hue campaign, Rath failed to do the same thing with either their wieners or their canned hams. The confusion about their audience and inability to adequately connect to those people doomed Rath’s hot dogs. On the other hand, their picnic campaign chose a poor theme at the start, making their canned ham (a commodity that already suffered from cultural associations with poverty and disease) seem low-quality and impossibly antiquated.

**Conclusion: Convenience meets Romanticism**

During the 1950s, a happier and much more prosperous time for Rath Packing, the company looked to bolster their spring sales with an Easter-focused media blitz. Promising high pre-sale numbers for salesmen and retailers alike, the crown jewel of the campaign was none other than a full page advertisement in one of the nation’s most popular magazines, *Life*. The packer promised many things, not the least of which was a strong public relations movement to

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entice home economists and food editors. They claimed that the Easter campaign would prove to be a big hit. After all, “Ham at Easter is an American Tradition--these millions of selling messages and reminder will change the climate--Ham will be in the spotlight.” So perhaps one of the oddest aspects of the campaign was what exactly the Life advertisement choose to focus on. Ham, of course, was present. But another theme claimed most of the spotlight.

It's Springtime in Iowa. And all the folks out these are planning the very newest for the Easter Parade. But when it comes to the Easter table, they're downright old-fashioned. For nothing in this push-button world has come along to equal the old-time county goodness of Rath Black Hawk Hams from the Land O' Corn. All Winter long, pampered porkers feasted on the golden harvests of the sun-drenched Iowa corn fields. And when they grew as plump as plum puddin', they came to Rath to be mellowed by the sweet smoke of hickory. You'll find them at your store in the familiar paper wrap or in vacuum-sealed tins. Then, add your own sugar 'n spice--and here's how it looks on the table. But no picture can capture its exquisite flavor. Only your fork can do that!

When looking through the lens of historical research, the focus seemed to be not on the product itself (though clearly the attributes of taste and accessibility were present), but on some mythical system and land of food production.

Land O’ Corn communicated a host of different images and associations. All the convenience of modern life was there, naturally, as the company trumpeted its vacuum sealed, sweet hickory quality. Yet, so too was an emphasis on rurality, a connection to the old-fashioned. Rath celebrated its connection to the past and its ability to bring that nostalgic goodness to its

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current, modern customer. The packer associated agriculture with wholesomeness and past
goodness. Perhaps more importantly, Rath then associated itself with this conception of
agriculture. They were, the company claimed, the twin providers of food to the masses and the
purchasers of this special kind of wholesomeness, the gatekeeper between the past, present, and
future.

And with more and more Americans stepping away from core food production, it was a
seed of an idea that fell in increasingly fertile ground. For this blend, this contradictory melding
of romantic ideals of an imagined past with the (mostly hidden) modern industrial system, would
grow to encompass all aspects of the food and fiber industry. From the seed house that supplied
the hybrids, the chemical corporation that provided the perfect biological environment, and the
implement manufacturer that delivered quick and convenient harvesting, to the packers that
processed those corn-fattened animals, agribusinesses from every aspect of the industry
subscribed to this new understanding of farming and food, one that would both hide their
growing influence while actually increasing their own hold on America’s agricultural system.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE AMERICAN WAY OF FARMING: THE EMERGENCE OF CONTRADICTION IN AGRICULTURE

In the early 1970s, two different men from two different industries found themselves with a similar purpose in mind: to find what sells. Before the golden hue campaign, Frank Perdue was looking to take his growing poultry company to the national market. On the other side of the table sat Al Paul Lefton, Jr. A marketing executive, he sought to add another high profile corporation to his growing list of advertising accounts. And while their backgrounds diverged in time and place, their experiences shared some remarkable parallels. Both men ended up working for companies founded by their fathers. Perdue and Lefton eventually took on leadership roles, becoming president and CEO of their respective companies. And both ultimately surpassed their fathers’ legacies, helping their companies become nationally recognized brands within their industries. Finally, Perdue and Lefton each had an eye for advertising. It was this last fact that was the key to their wider success.

So perhaps it was sad twist of not-quite-fate that instead of agreeing on a shared marketing scheme, Perdue spurned Lefton for another advertising firm. After all, a joint venture between such different yet oddly comparable men would have made for a serendipitous historical narrative.

Yet, this crucial non-meeting of the minds chronicled an even more important historical realization, the full scope of farming as a marketable conception. When wooing Perdue, Lefton and his employees pitched a company makeover based on one word: farm. The ad man wrote that inserting “farm” to the Perdue name

triggers a whole range of positive associations that would be to your benefit. It further quickly telegraphs the nature of your business. Also, there is a wholesomeness to farms

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that's undeniable…it tends to transport a company from the cold impersonal association of manufacturing to a warmer, more relatable human enterprise. Furthermore, there is a distinctive rural, agrarian feel to Farms that would be a natural for Perdue.\textsuperscript{642}

In a market saturated with products and companies competing for attention, a solid “identity” was the pivotal piece of the puzzle. “Farms” offered a substantial array of positive assumptions to a public facing a consolidating and rapidly changing food system. Farming was culturally valued, possessing an ideological capital in American society. As such, “farming” as a form of identification could be a profitable and effective conception to exploit. Perdue could harness this association to sell their products and the system that produced them. And though the poultry company decided to pass on the advertising firm that first suggested it, Perdue did eventually decide to change its tradename to “Perdue Farm.” Despite the failure of the gambit, Lefton’s ideas about the marketability of farming could not have been more on point.

The postwar period witnessed a shocking number of changes to America’s food system. State policy encouraged a “get big or get out” mentality in agriculture. Scientific and technological development increased agricultural efficiency and production. The growth of supermarket chains reconstructed the physical landscape of buying and selling. Middle class values levelled customer expectations and consumption patterns. Finally, the explosion of agribusiness produced a new level of corporatization never seen before in the food chain. These changes, even when embraced, were no doubt unnerving for many. The takeover of a treasured cultural icon and American tradition by a corporate agro-industrial complex was an uncomfortable thought. The public did not wanted to think of a cold, impersonal bureaucracy controlling the process of food production. The notion of industrial farms and corporate factories

\textsuperscript{642} Letter to Frank Perdue from Al Lefton, February 8, 1971, Box 36, File 406, Perdue Chicken Records.
producing a “wholesome” meal seemed at the same time preposterous and unpleasant. Instead, it was much easier to accept agricultural production as warm, human enterprise, even if the material world reflected very little of this. This contradiction was a quagmire for companies. How did a company sell a food system that made people uncomfortable with its very reality? The answer, it seemed, lay in the power of perception and the ability of private institutions to manipulate public awareness.

Aware that this new system of food production and consumption was problematic and difficult to market, agribusinesses deliberately crafted a nostalgic and romanticized vision of agriculture that was much more palatable and comforting. This “American Way of Farming” sold agribusiness’ products (and the system that produced them) by shrouding them in talismans and symbols of an older, more understandable agricultural network. In dressing this new system with elements of the old, companies could affirm that despite some changes (always portrayed as beneficial), the essential parts of production and consumption had not changed: that agriculture and the food it generated were still created in a certain kind of place and sustained by a certain kind of American. This allowed businesses to attach themselves to wholesomeness while actually hiding unpleasant elements of corporatization.

Agribusinesses at both ends of the food chain used this deliberate veneer of farming as a marketing tool to simplify public conceptions. Companies across the spectrum, from the seed houses that sold the hybrids to packers that processed the corn-fed meat, all played a role in creating and sustaining this façade. Using America’s cultural mythology surrounding agriculture, agribusinesses sought to repackage themselves in a way that made their operations more palatable to the masses. In the end, they attempted to obscure the totality of their business and the changes it inflicted behind comforting images of an American icon.
Consequently, corporate manipulations created a profound disconnection between the public’s conceptual understanding and the industrial reality of postwar agriculture. It was just another way agribusinesses sought to solidify their place within the food and fiber economy. By hiding the reality of a capitalistic and industrial food chain, agribusinesses attempted to control how the public perceived the industry. These illusions limited questions and inquiry by a public that increasingly lacked real experience with agricultural production. This marketing strategy rendered unpleasant elements invisible while highlighting others that neatly fit into this public relations strategy. It also allowed businesses to continue their appropriation of the industry in relative peace, ignored by the public and sustained by a web of expertise. For agribusiness, “the American Way of Farming” was a happy veneer covering the rapid growth of corporate forces within agriculture.

Public Awareness and Public Relations

Corporations were well aware of the strong influence public perception could have on their continued success or failure. While federal law or competitors could derail a new product or revenue stream, the consumer represented the most dangerous of potential pitfalls. Customers, when armed with negative information and united in purpose, could bring down even the most prosperous of companies. As such, engineering public opinion took on new importance in this age of corporate growth. From an occupational standpoint, public relations took steps towards professionalization, becoming an essential part of corporate structure by the midcentury.643 Public relations as a tool allowed companies to translate corporate information to the public and,

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in turn, interpret customer desires and values to the company. Understanding the customer base, and having the customer understand the company, was a key aspect of this growing sub-industry.

As a vehicle of information, a company’s public relations department was also the first line of defense when scandal, corruption, or other publicity nightmares rocked corporate offices. Writing for the University of Chicago business journal, Nugent Wedding remarked that the widening distance between management and the public created more possibilities for misinformation. Thus, “One of the important tasks of public relations is to bridge these gaps, to bring about better mutual understanding and appreciation of the vital part business management plays in our economy.”

Albert Ayar, at the firm Hill & Knowlton, Inc., argued that the purpose of public relations was, “to build and maintain public good will and thus assure the survival of the free competitive enterprise system which has been instrumental in establishing for Americans the world's highest living standard.” Even scholarly dialogue about the nature of corporate action could be seen as a threat to the industry. When historian David M. Potter argued that modern advertising subverted American values, he quickly found himself attacked by a defensive professorate. Professors of Business Thomas Petit and Alan Zakon bristled at Potter’s assumptions. Instead, they insisted that advertising was an institution that educated an information-needy public and therefore supported and strengthened the larger economy.

Those involved in the study of agriculture also understood the transformative power of public relations.

Perception concerned many agribusinesses and most took steps to understand public attitudes and increase their reputation. International Harvester invested a significant amount of capital attempting to pinpoint what the public thought of their company and what they could do

to improve these opinions. Throughout the fifties and sixties, the implement dealer commissioned a number of public surveys. Some examined specific topics from particular audiences, such as trade name usage by local farmers and dealers. Others were much more general, covering basic public opinions about the company itself. Administered by the Opinion Research Corporation, the general survey was meant to, “provide participating companies with information that will help them in the conduct of their relationships with the many publics with which they must deal.” After a disappointing review in 1966, the company’s public relations department wanted to revitalize their image. Sending out a statement of company objectives, the primary goal was to present the company in a positive light. The key was to show the company as a dynamic and progressive organization with high technical competence. In doing this, the ultimate goal was for the public to view International Harvester as a good company to buy from and work for.

Other agribusinesses also tested the waters of public opinion. In 1956, Pioneer contracted with a market research firm to investigate the views of their contracted seed dealers. Interviewing these men and women (and recording them without their knowledge), the Opinion Research Consultants sought to understand dealer sale techniques, how dealers viewed the company, and how customers perceived the company. Six months earlier, the company had hired a different firm to examine the attitudes of their dealers. After a round of consultation, the Research Institute of America concluded that company salesmen generally viewed Pioneer in a

647 Opinion Research Corporation, “Farm Machinery Trade Name Usage by Farmers and Implement Dealers,” Survey for International Harvester, April 4, 1946, Box 54, File 15451, International Harvester Central File.
649 Statement to Mr. Bercher and Corporate Accounting from the Public Relations Department, June 25, 1966, Box 51, File 16083, International Harvester Central File.
favorable light (though grumbling about internal strife did exist).\textsuperscript{651} Taking a slightly different tack, Monsanto sought to move its market research in house. Stressing the need for better marketing research and customer inquiry, Monsanto’s planners suggested that improved study of public desires could cut down on losses and set the stage for continued growth.\textsuperscript{652} Rath routinely gave out consumer surveys about their various products.\textsuperscript{653} Even Frank Perdue acknowledged the need to look carefully at every letter sent by a housewife and classify why she decided to write. He commented, “I am not saying they are not all ‘nuts’ but we should see what those thought who were interested enough to write.”\textsuperscript{654} Apparently, the crazy customers mattered too.

Ultimately these surveys allowed companies to get a better understanding of consumer attitudes and beliefs. Corporations wanted to be seen as friendly, progressive, and decidedly human. Dirty laundry wrecked this image and caused a number of different headaches. Sometimes these problems could be systemic issues that plagued the industry as a whole. Labor disputes and health scandals could dominate the airwaves and generate negative publicity. After the Second World War, much of the nation’s manufacturing sector, including implement dealers and meat packers, entered into a protracted battle with labor unions over pensions, hours, compensation, and other basic workers’ rights. Over a five year period in the early 1950s, International Harvester scrambled to put a positive spin on its bitter dispute with plant workers. Annual shareholder reports conveyed several different yet equally unsatisfying conclusions about these distractions. In 1950, they reported an agreement with the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO), announcing a return to long term stability and implying an end to labor

\textsuperscript{651} The Research Institute of America, Inc., “Attitude Audit of Salesmen in Pioneer Corn Company, Inc.,” December 1955, Box 3, File 93, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
\textsuperscript{652} Monsanto, “Business Research in Monsanto,” sent to RM Lawrence, Shea Smith, WH Winfield, and RW Crawford, February 20, 1951, 1-4, Series 10, Box 3, File 21, Monsanto Collection.
\textsuperscript{654} Letter to Tom Robinson from Frank Perdue, November 4, 1970, Box 29, File 300, Perdue Chicken Records.
issues.\textsuperscript{655} The peace lasted less than a year, with slowdowns and other labor resistance once again prompting the company to publicize a new and improved plan to eliminate labor problems.\textsuperscript{656} By the next year, perhaps exasperated and unsure of its next move, International Harvester meekly promised to create a harmonious relationship with various unions without giving further details. It concluded, with more feeling, that it was sick of all the strikes.\textsuperscript{657} Monsanto faced its own national headache in the form of a book that threatened its most promising new source of revenue, DDT. With the publication of Rachel Carson’s \textit{Silent Spring}, the chemical industry faced one of its greatest challenges. Public awareness of the use of pesticides soared, creating a debate about ecological consequences that could not be easily quelled. In fact, many of the aggressive tactics adopted by chemical corporations only exacerbated the problem, causing more of an uproar.\textsuperscript{658}

While national scandals were never good for company image, even small local issues could threaten public relations. Something as minor as inter-departmental rivalry or employee miscues might depreciate the company’s value in the eyes of the public. Pioneer, with its company structure built on contract work, especially struggled to contain problematic dealers.\textsuperscript{659}

One Arkansas salesman named Melvin Callahan became angry when the company contracted

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\item\textsuperscript{659} This was a difficult issue, in part because Pioneer did not technically employ their dealers. Because of the system of contracted labor, the company lacked the leverage of other private enterprises to enforce their will. This was compounded by the fact that many of these dealers, especially in the early part of the postwar period, only worked part time as a way to diversify their farm income.
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other nearby locals to sell hybrids, complaining that these sub-dealers were infringing on his territory. Sales director A.R. Marston directed area manager Harris Hix to let to situation cool off to avoid creating a worse condition for the company. During another intra-company squabble, several Pioneer salesmen from different divisions (Eastern and Illinois) found themselves directly competing for sales in the same territory along the Illinois-Indiana border. Facing a competitive price that could hurt local sales, Pioneer Eastern Division agreed to lower the cost for their division’s specific dealer as long as the situation was handled quietly. Unable to punish the Illinois dealer, Eastern Division Head Robert Woods worried that the situation would spread to other border territories and give leverage to other salesmen who wanted a better price. This problem soon repeated itself on the border between Michigan and Ohio, when an enterprising dealer placed an advertisement in another salesmen’s territory. Woods asked the regional manager to contain the issue and explained, “I realize it is a pretty hard thing to try to build a fence around any given territory, and we of course never like to take the position of trying to tell any farmer that he definitely has to buy Pioneer from a certain salesman. Also, we know it’s not good business on our part to have two men canvassing the same community.”

Although Pioneer wanted to enforce its will, the company did not want to alienate contracted dealers who could easily terminate their relationship with the company, or worse, jump ship to a competitor. Therefore, Pioneer and other seed houses were forced to walk a tight line between corporate desire and local wishes.

Other times the threat of possible public displeasure became so large that business rivals would band together in an attempt to secure favorable industry standards. When public unease

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661 Letter to Harris Hix from Robert Woods, August 12, 1955, Box 2, File 33, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
over slaughtering methods grew in the late 1950s, Rath Packing formed a committee with other members of the American Meat Institute to discuss their options. The committee acknowledged that the Secretary of Agriculture, “could conceivably say that the present shackling, hoisting, and sticking process for hogs is humane. However, in the face of all the public agitation it is doubtful he would make such a ruling.” Representatives worried that this public pressure could force new federal regulations, a possibility that no one within the industry wanted. Instead, AMI recommended that members encourage new methods of slaughter within their plants, with an obvious undercurrent stressing a need to decrease public awareness of this difficult topic.663

In a similar vein, marketers warned Perdue Chicken that certain imagery and phrases could hurt their sales. The advertising firm of Byride, Richard, and Pound, Inc. also advised Perdue to keep “forbidden thoughts” from entering the mind of their customers. This included completely removing the packing process from marketing. The firm stressed that the poultry company should, “Never show a live chicken or chick. Never show an uncooked Perdue chicken except in the exact form and package the housewife will see it in the shop. Never imply that the user will be eating a live animal or fowl. Never imply that Perdue must kill something to bring the housewife her food. Never imply that what the user is eating was, at one time, cute or darling, or cuddly, or small, or tender, or needing care.”664 Along with these clear guidelines, the advertiser insisted that company should never suggest that their food was anything less than one hundred percent nutritious and perfect. The moral of the story was, “don’t mention processing at all.” With these suggestions in mind, Byride, Richard, and Pound, Inc. implored Perdue to drop their advertising tagline that their chickens were guaranteed, healthy, and (disturbingly) less than

nine weeks old. The age piece was particularly damaging. “You are hurting your own sales, and
the sales of the industry. What your present agency may consider to be good selling copy is in
fact--in the minds of many of those who have heard it--repulsive. It doesn't matter who is right
and who is wrong. We have gone out into the market and found that women realize you are
killing little things less than 9 weeks old.”

On the most basic level, this American Way of Farming sought to hide all of these
possible problems behind a convenient façade. By emphasizing an idealized place (heartland), an
idealized people (family), and an idealized tradition (nostalgia), this trope appealed to a
population divorced from real agricultural experience. Though Americans think of the postwar
period as an age of stability, America was undergoing a great many changes. On an agricultural
level, trends in the economy made it difficult for many to continue on as farmers. With input
costs rising and overproduction causing commodity values to drop, a price squeeze caught many
farm families in the middle. Some, the most well off, were able to adapt to the changing
economy, getting bigger and more specialized. Others altered their income sources, staying on
the land by having family members work off the farm. For many though, the only option was to
leave agriculture altogether. These families sold their farms and the move away was permanent.
Though fewer and fewer families were involved in the production food and fiber, surpluses of
key commodities grew larger. More than ever before, business firms played a role in the political
and economic direction of agriculture. At the same time, as more people left agricultural
production, changes to food consumption patterns profoundly altered what and how people
shopped, prepared, and ate. Conceptions of convenience, middle class values, and corporate
growth altered the consumption patterns and environment. People spent less time on food

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preparation partly because they could and partly because time was a finite commodity that needed to be conserved for other more pleasurable activities. In the end then, from a food and fiber standpoint, such changes radically altered the American agricultural network, food chain, and conceptual understandings of production and consumption.

**Wholesomeness: It’s What’s For Dinner**

Many of these alterations, along with a tense geo-political atmosphere, created a social longing for something simpler, cleaner, and altogether wholesome. The American Way of Farming fit this desire perfectly. It offered customers what they wanted in a convenient, modern way. Americans could conceivably believe that their food came from a moral and clean place, created by honest and healthy people. Agribusinesses checked off all the necessary marketing boxes, while ultimately hiding displeasing truths. They could both present themselves as innate parts of an idyllic system and veil the system required to bring Americans such low-cost, nutritious, and tasty food. From a marketing standpoint, it seemed like winners all round, hiding the inhuman bureaucracy behind a human face.

The feeling of wholesomeness was in many ways the key ingredient to making the American Way of Farming work as a marketing strategy. As a conception, wholesomeness invoked feelings of mental, physical, and spiritual wellness. It sought to soothe customers’ anxiety about health and freshness under a guise of natural goodness and simplicity. Its purpose was specifically *not* to examine, define, or elaborate, but to simplify and obscure, to “make it seem simple for shoppers to get what they wanted for their daily meals,” as historian Roger Horowitz wrote.666 In her discussion of the changing conception of freshness, Susanne Friedberg remarked that the removal of food production from everyday life made it easier to overlook the

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666 Horowitz, 151.
sharp difference between how food was marketed and how it was actually produced. Just like freshness, marketing wholesomeness served to show one thing and hide another. She wrote, “advertising sold both goods and reassurance, as it still does. It prompted newness for its own sake and as protection against modernity's potential harm to social, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. Fresh foods embodied this paradoxical message better than most goods.”  

During the postwar period, wholesomeness carefully aligned with images of postwar idealism, romantic agrarianism, and human goodness, all elements that food and fiber corporations coveted. Additionally, the conception’s vague nature gave it a fluidity that was attractive to many different types of corporations. Its ambiguity was a strength rather than a weakness, allowing it to be used for many different situations and products.

As an attribute, wholesomeness corresponded well with agribusinesses’ own desire to be viewed positively by the public. Instead of being viewed as a large corporate bureaucracy wholly concerned with making money, many companies wished to be seen in a more human light. From a corporate point of view, company products and services were there to serve the good of humanity. In one John Deere booklet, the implement dealer complained that not enough respect was given to the company whose commodities created “plenty” in a world filled with need. The corporation therefore created this booklet as a revealing look at its contribution to human history and as a “reflection of the fruits of free minds, as proof that a company can be something other than a big, impersonal, unfeeling machine.” By discussing John Deere, the man and his legacy, the agribusiness looked to bring a more personal vision of their company, one that emphasized simplicity and homespun values. Rath stressed its leadership in the food industry by boasting

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667 Friedberg, 7-15.
of its pioneering techniques and focus on farmers. Perdue Chicken spent considerable effort attempting to elect its founder, Arthur Perdue, to the APHS Poultry Hall of Fame. By emphasizing his personal and business standards, the company hoped customers would see a softer, familial side of the chicken company.

Monsanto also sought to change the way certain segments of the population regarded the chemical giant. The corporation looked to produce a more favorable mindset in an important future investment, college students. Corporations involved in technical and scientific innovation were keenly aware of the need to groom future employees. International Harvester maintained a serious public relations campaign across agricultural campuses even after it began to shift its focus away from farm tools and machines. For Monsanto, especially after the PR debacle of Silent Spring, the push to reshape young minds started in earnest in the early 1960s. The company began with the appointment of a new manager of professional recruiting and college relations, a move that combined all of the company’s higher education programs under one department. This eventually flowered into a company sponsored symposium in 1965. Meant to lure interested student chemists and engineers, the event was specifically designed to change opinions about Monsanto and the industry at large. Chemical Week praised the move, reporting that most of the young people, having grown up under prosperity, believed that profit was undesirable and, “oblivious to the fact that industry and trade are the chief wellspring of our relative affluence.” The trade press commended Monsanto for creating a constructive university-business dialogue that showed the industry in the best light: “Business is not the enemy but

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672 Monsanto, “News Release,” January 22, 1962, Series 1, Box 6, File 11, Monsanto Collection
rather the sustainer of nonmaterial values.” The best opportunity to do this was to find a way to play on the students’ need to be useful, to show that the chemical industry provided goods and services that satisfied human needs.673

When it came to their products, agribusinesses also wanted to evoke a sense of wholesomeness. It is important to recognize the power of wholesomeness in marketing, especially when selling products that had such a profound connection to the human body. Food, as a consumable, is unique among products. It is perishable, consumed through ingestion, and has a profound and immediate effect on health. Taste, flavor, nutrition, and individual perception all play critical roles in its marketability. A campaign that satisfied these traits and associated the product with moral and physical wellness was then an especially attractive option for companies. When examining Rath’s irregular growth since the late 1950s, their marketing firm, Earle Ludgin & Company, stressed the need for the company to continue its commitment to strong meaningful graphics (especially in the face of competitors claims of quality). The marketers then suggested a bold new theme to jumpstart Rath’s return to prominence, “Rath is a Sunday Kind of Ham.” They argued that, “A Sunday kind of ham is the best you can buy. It's the kind you serve when the whole family is finally together on Sunday. It's the kind you serve to friends and special guest. A Sunday Kind of Ham evokes memories about the good old days - the way everyone likes to remember the past. Nostalgic. Warm and human, secure. It establishes a quality identity for Rath.”674 This appeal fit neatly with much of the market research that Rath undertook in the late 1950s. Their studies indicated that housewives saw cooking as a method of earning approval and praise. While good housekeeping received little recognition from other family members,

cooking resulted in immediate satisfaction.\textsuperscript{675} Foods that fulfilled this need for recognition and helped demonstrate talent were therefore much sought after.

On the other hand, if products incited a sense of “unwholesomeness,” the consequences could be devastating. Though marketing campaigns mostly tried to create and maintain demand, sometimes situations arose that required companies to approach their campaigns in a different manner. One such condition was negative demand, “a state in which all or most of the important segments of the potential market dislike the product and in fact might conceivably pay a price to avoid it.” In order to combat this, a marketer needed to first examine why the population devalued the product the way it did and then take steps to modify such feelings.\textsuperscript{676} For instance, many pork products faced negative demand from a population hungry for beef and chicken. Rath took steps to identify the issue (problematic production, customer demographics that trended older, competitor claims, and overall lack of demand) and sought a solution that addressed some of these problems (a Sunday kind of ham).\textsuperscript{677} Surprisingly, chicken also had to reckon with possible unwholesome images disrupting their growth in the market. While demand for broilers rested on an “old impression of luxury,” economic integration and new production methods threatened to expose unpleasant changes to the industry.\textsuperscript{678} The growth in broiler contracts and factory-like confinement did not meld with perceptions of happy and healthy chickens. One housewife claimed she could tell which chickens were allowed to breathe fresh air and which ones were confined to dark henhouses. She maintained, “it's a terrible thing that they keep hens


\textsuperscript{678} Perdue Chicken, “Our Part of the Chicken: Some proposals covers aspects of the advertising of A.W. Perdue and Son,” circa late 1960s, 1, Box 29, File 293, Perdue Chicken Records.
cooped up in cages in the dark—you can tell from the flavor whether they are happy or not.”

Luckily for the broiler industry, public awareness of confinement and contract farming remained relatively minimal for the rest of the century.

The Response

In order to fulfill this need for wholesomeness, agribusiness looked to create a specific trope that satisfied public craving. Its image was something that agribusinesses across the food chain played a role in creating. Despite the fact that input companies like Pioneer or DuPont did not sell agricultural commodities to the public at large (for the most part), their actions still affected wider conceptual understandings of farming. As part of their makeup, these companies were some the first names that came to mind when it came to agriculture. While people might not understand the farming process (a much more likely experience as the century crept onward), they would know that John Deere sold tractors or that Pioneer was somehow connected to corn. It was a powerful association that agribusinesses wished to deepen on a cultural level, using this marketing façade to further bind the associations between themselves and farming. On an economic note, agribusinesses like International Harvester, Monsanto, and others were publicly held corporations with shareholders across the country. Not only was it important to continuously reassure these individuals of constant growth, but also to attract new investors. PR campaigns were meant to bolster stock revenue. On the whole, public relations were meant to generate positive responses by the public at large, not just the specific customer base. A campaign idea that could both attract new investors and create a positive public persona was therefore extremely attractive. Many companies deliberately conveyed an external appearance for shareholders and the public based on agrarian ideals. Annual reports, newsletters, company

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magazines, booklets, and other documentation all contributed to this conception of agricultural production and food consumption.

Crafting a public façade that repackaged an industry to fit public desires was difficult task to say the least. Companies needed to tap into cultural longings without tipping their hand too far into the outlandish or cartoonish, telling the public what they wanted to hear while not fostering more inquiry. Luckily for agribusinesses, they were already intimately connected to a cultural mythology that fit many of the requirements. All these corporations had to do was conflate this agrarian mythos with the totality of their business: playing on symbols to redecorate their wider public image. In order to walk this tightrope, the façade needed to be adaptable to businesses across the food chain.

With this fluidity a purposeful choice on the part of agribusinesses, identifying the exact traits of this marketing invention can be difficult, especially when put under a historic microscope. Companies never constructed a defined image of this message because its vagueness and fluidity were two of its major benefits. The marketing needed to be malleable to fit new situations and new products, from a new strain of hybrids to canned pork. Specificity could do more harm than good, forcing companies to address missteps and obvious signs of misinformation. Agribusinesses crafted this ethos to give off positive impressions and associations, not to be interrogated and examined. In fact, doing so would destroy the illusion.

All of this being said, there were certain identifiable features of this marketing trope. These specific tenets intermingled to form a marketable image of agriculture that agribusinesses

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used to tie their operations to a wholesome conception of agriculture. On the most basic level, “the American Way of Farming” was an idealized depiction of agriculture with corporate products and operations. Even as it reinforced the moral economy of farming and celebrated farmers as honest, salt of the earth stewards of the land, this marketing scheme also sought to align their efforts with those of yeoman. Tapping into public longings and cultural mythology, agribusinesses presented a sanitized version of farms as clean, pure, and wholesome, an idyllic heartland stewarded by happy and healthy family farmers. This crafted image, one so seemingly divorced from reality, was the Trojan Horse in the agricultural economy. By continuously making the association between food production and this happy image, agribusinesses could both draw on positive overtones and hide any inconvenient truths when necessary.

One of the clear ideological pillars of this conception rested on was the belief in agriculture’s moral superiority and the benefits it gave to its practitioners and society at large. Within the wide range of agrarianism, the morality of its subject has always been a prominent part of its rhetoric. Salt-of-the-earth and independent, these people represented ideal Americans. In order to convey these notions, agricultural companies set out on extensive public relations campaigns that bombarded the nation with tailored images and suggestions. Constant messaging appeared to be the key to successful promotions, as one Rath employee commented, “In the modern marketing of [meat] products, communications are vital to success. Communications to retailers through your personal selling and to consumers through merchandising, advertising, and sales promotion are all necessary to the success of the products we sell.”681 To make their communications work, agribusinesses tapped into three identifiable and easily advertised sub-themes: the Heartland, the Family, and Nostalgia.

The Heartland

An emphasis on “the heartland” was a good fit for companies looking to tie vague sentiments of wholesomeness and agricultural environments together. Though originally used to describe the hinterland of North-Central Europe, Americans began to use the term in earnest after the Second World War. Applied extensively to an ambiguous definition of the Midwest, the “heartland” embodied a sense of health, wellness, economic self-sufficiency, hospitality, and hominess. Agribusinesses used this theme extensively in their descriptions of America’s agricultural land. International Harvester remarked that tilled soil was a hope for the future and the land was a “heritage to husband.” John Deere described the land of the Midwest as “rich” and America as the most, “abundant horn of plenty the world.” Rath boasted that it was located, “right in the richest corn-fed livestock area in the world.” In promotions sent to retailers around the country, the Iowa packer often showed its products next to cartoonish depictions of barnyards surrounded by lush fields, a picturesque version of America’s middle landscape.

Like Rath, other companies often utilized images and symbols to show rather than describe this romantized agrarian landscape. Advertisements for farm products from businesses across the food chain frequently featured rich landscapes flowering with carefully cultivated

685 Rath Packing Company, “Profit more with Rath con-fed beef,” circa 1960s, 2, Series 8, Box 6, File 17, Rath Packing Company Records.
686 For a typical example, see, Rath Packing Company, “Cedar Farm Brand Picnic,” 1967, Series 8, Box 6, File 6, Rath Packing Company Records.
plant life.\textsuperscript{687} These depictions regularly included male figures, clothed in the workmen’s gear, engaged in some sort of serious stewardship of the land. Sometimes these men were concentrating on the crop itself, dramatically examining the plant for the camera.\textsuperscript{688} Other times they appeared to be in serious discussions with other like-minded individuals or posing on large mechanical equipment.\textsuperscript{689} Whatever the variety of props and postures, the basic formula remained the same; America’s agricultural land was rich, filled with abundance (made possible by products) and stewarded by a serious, well-intentioned farmers.

Out of all the symbols used, the focus on corn was perhaps the most prominent. While many employed barns as a symbol of agrarian promise, corn fit well as an embodiment of the heartland.\textsuperscript{690} It represented a very real and very recognizable emblem of farming, an emblem of successful cultivation and rural spaces. After all, the corn ear had long been the brand symbol of hybrid seed houses. While DeKalb’s winged corn was the most recognized house symbol, less famous hybrid companies also used the cob as a mark of success and quality.\textsuperscript{691} DeKalb’s rival Pioneer also utilized corn in the realm of marketing. Pictures, cartoons, salesmen letters, and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item For examples of barns as advertising symbols, see, Rath Packing Company, “Cedar Farm Brand Picnic,” 1967, Series 8, Box 6, File 6, Rath Packing Company Records.
\item These include Certified Indiana Hybrid, Earl May’s, Hi-Cal Hybrid, Holden’s Ioway Super Corn, and many others. Undated but circa 1920-1960, Box 1 and 2, Seed Company Sign Collection, Iowa State Special Collections.
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many other company documents used corn to symbolize their connection to rurality. It was not just an emphasis on rural life, but a specific kind of prosperity that could be bought and consumed. As maize held a symbolic significance for early Native Americans tribes, so too did it signify fertility and agricultural richness for Americans in the twentieth century. Agribusinesses alleged that they could control, bottle, and sell this fertility for a price. Pioneer, DeKalb, Funk, and other hybrid companies believed they could breed it. Chemical giants Monsanto, Dow, and DuPont argued they could nurture it. John Deere and International Harvester claimed to cultivate and harvest it. Conceptions of agricultural prosperity and success compressed into a simple symbol of a corn cob.

This representation was also present among food processors. Some meat packers in the early postwar period especially saw corn as a viable advertising symbol. Rath’s marketing campaigns in the 1950s focused almost exclusively on their location deep in the cornbelt. Using the slogan “from the land” O’Corn,” Rath touted its corn-fed meat as uniquely tasty and rich in flavor. Whereas corn symbolized agricultural fertility and ripeness for input companies, Rath used corn to show quality. The richness, it seemed, was not in the land, but rather livestock. By ingesting the fertile goodness of the corn, Iowa’s hogs and cattle took on the same qualities. One Rath ad stressed that their luncheon meats’, “Corn-fed flavor needs no ‘fancy fixings.’” Instead, “To make this tender luncheon meat, we take choice, sweet pork that's been raised on fine Iowa corn…the finest-eating pork there is!”692 A later advertisement for bacon continued to stress the company’s placement in the nation’s cornbelt. Rath’s bacon postcard boasted, “Lean--tender--hickory fragrant--and with that extraordinary corn-fed flavor. Here's a special kind of Bacon that

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we produce in Waterloo, Iowa, the heart of corn country.”693 Though the company did move away from this singular focus by the mid-1960s, it was continued in some regions. Starting in the early 1970s, Rath commissioned a sub-brand called Kornland. Much like their other sub-brand, Cedar Farm, Kornland’s boneless ham and bacon products played on a pastoral motif.694 The company was not alone in its continued use of corn as symbol. Its competitors, including Corn King and Roegelein, also sought to remind their customers of country goodness through the usage of corn. One Corn King advertisement for the Dallas market repeated that its hams were “a feast of corn-country flavor.”695 Another proudly displayed the Corn King slogan, “as Sweet ’n Fresh as an Iowa morning.”696 This imagery of a corn-laden heartland reinforced associations between a specific kind of wholesome agriculture and the Midwest.

Regional fetishism was not an uncommon practice in the food retail industry. The association of place and commodity has long influenced American perceptions of states and regions. For example, despite the fact Georgia produces more pounds of chickens, eggs, blueberries, peanuts, pecans, and cotton, the nation still connects the state with peaches. Wisconsin has been out produced by California’s dairies for decades, yet the state still claims to be the nation’s dairyland. And while Hawaii might be famous for its sugar production, foreign imports have whittled down the state’s industry to nothing. Yet, these associations persist and reveal important popular reflections of these places. In the realm of retail, these connotations represented attractive marketing opportunities for companies. As scholar Cary de Wit noted

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696 Corn King, “Advertisement—All with Country Flavor,” 1972, Series 1, Box 1, File 39, Rath Packing Company Records.
when discussing food-place associations on product labels, “food producers and marketers use specific place references because their popular images lend an air of distinctiveness, authenticity, or quality to the products and marketers’ choice of labeling accurately reflects popular perceptions and association.” In fact, this regionalism can have a decisive impact on market creation, both within and outside the United States. Moya Kneafsey and Brian Ilbery showed how small producers within the English “West Country” have been able to create connections between regional images and quality. Domestic tourism within Japan depended heavily on consumption of a “disappearing” rurality and its traditions in urban focused society. In the United States, Helen Zoe Veit argued that interest in regional cuisines skyrocketed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when industrializing forces homogenized national foodways. Perhaps more than any other commodity, food and fiber retains the ability to be recognized as a specific cultural icon of place.

The Midwest, with its heartland reputation, was an ideal candidate for agribusinesses’ regional fetishization. It hit all the correct cultural buttons, featuring a godly, hardworking people living in a well-ordered and wholesome landscape. When Monsanto described the values of Iowa farmers, the company remarked that, “cattle-raising was next to godliness, and cleanliness a respected but distinct third.” Rath advocated that customers who bought their sliced meats could “do-it-yourself, Iowa Style,” alluding to the practical and independent nature of country

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life.\textsuperscript{702} Pioneer pronounced that the reason they decided to focus their egg laying efforts in the Midwest was due to the region’s emphasis on “family and community.”\textsuperscript{703} Though more than just these cultural touchstones, the fetishization of region (particularly the Midwest) played an important part of crafting agribusiness’ illusion about food production. Its presence helped conceal the very real changes the food chain was undertaking while reinforcing assumptions of country life. Instead of thinking of industrial agriculture, factory production, and the long winding road of the cold chain, it was much easier to imagine a pastoral heartland, where wholesome land created wholesome food.

Perhaps no company placed more emphasized on this imagined Midwest heartland than Rath. Although many other corporations held meaningful connections to the Midwest, Rath completely crafted its public image around this regional identity. The packer looked to correlate the superior quality of its products with Iowa itself, stressing the company’s origins in “corn-country.”\textsuperscript{704} Rath underscored the ability of Iowa’s corn to give Rath meats innate qualities unmatched by products produced elsewhere. Tenderness, leanness, flavor, freshness, and richness were all aspects that an imagined Iowa countryside bequeathed to its harvests.\textsuperscript{705} By extension, the customer could expect to ingest the rich goodness of an Iowan summer day. Even when the company moved on to new thematic campaigns, Iowa as a fantasy heartland lay at the center of their marketing efforts. The packer’s “Iowa Sends Her Best” campaign was meant to

\textsuperscript{703} Pioneer, “Expand,” circa 1964, 1-3, Box 10, File 6, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
revitalize sales on the West Coast, utilizing regional associations with the Midwest to evoke a sense of heartland values. One San Diego advertisement for Rath’s cold cuts announced, “In Iowa, where Rath meats come from, good food is a matter of pride. Because there, in the center of the heartland, there’s no need to settle for second best.” Without ever setting foot on a hog farm or visiting Rath’s Waterloo plant, the people of San Diego knew everything the company wanted them to: “we think you’ll appreciate the Iowa in us!”

Whenever possible, agribusinesses tried to meld themselves with an illusory depiction of the Midwest. Within that same story about Iowa farmers, Monsanto insisted that its brand of chemistry, “is there too, in the fat calves, sleek hogs, blushing tomatoes and golden corn.” Roswell Garst argued that by informing customers of new techniques and advancements, Pioneer dealers served the farmer and the wider community. When contracting an institutional history of Rath for the company’s anniversary, the book promised to include, “a background of Iowa agriculture and animal husbandry, two of the fundamental reasons for Rath's success.” Instead of hosting an open house tour of the processing plant, the public relations firm in charge of the event, Young and Rubicam Inc., suggested testimonials from different farm groups, including the Farm Bureau and the Grange. Though left unsaid, Young and Rubicam’s hesitation over the plant tour was obviously tied to both issues of feasibility and the unpleasant elements of hog processing. It was so much easier, not to mention cleaner, to dwell on statements of satisfied farmers. Seeing the actual disassembly process would fundamentally subvert the image Rath and

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707 Ibid.
710 Letter to R.A. Rath from D.G. Schneider, April 11, 1941, Series 1, Box 1, File 53, Rath Packing Company.
711 Young and Rubicam Inc., “Supplementary memorandum on publicity for 50th anniversary of the Rath Packing Company,” February 18, 1941, 3-6, Series 1, Box 1, File 53, Rath Packing Company Records.
other businesses tried to market. These corporate entities definitely wanted consumers to associate agribusinesses with wholesome food, just not how that food actually got there in the first place.

Ironically, this emphasis, though important to building an overall image for the wider public, did not extend to all aspects of the public relations. Young and Rubicam expressed doubt about Rath’s planned anniversary event for area farmers. While acknowledging the goodwill it could generate, the firm doubted it could make the experience attractive enough to entice farm attendance. Finding a suitable speaker was another major issue, as Young and Rubicam remarked on the difficulty of locating a “natural” speaker who would be accepted by the farming audience. With these issues in mind, the firm recommended that the company drop the event from the celebration altogether.\footnote{Ibid, 6-7.} In fact, sometimes this single minded imagery could even undermine other aspects of company marketing. For example, International Harvester’s insistence on utilizing heartland imagery annoyed many of their agricultural audience outside the Midwest. These men and women expressed irritation with what they viewed as a clearly false landscape, one that had no connection to the one they saw outside their windows. The major offenders, the flatness of the land and the lack of recognizable local families, subverted meaningful messages in the company’s regional publications.\footnote{International Harvester, “Dealer Opinions Regarding TRACTOR FARMING Magazine,” part of Farm Machinery Reports Volume 8, July 11, 1962, Box 332, File 15568, International Harvester Central File.} Although blurring the lines between what was real and what was imagined benefited companies with the larger public, it did have its consequences with specific audiences.

However, the Midwest was not the only region used by agribusinesses to sell their products. In fact, when it came to chicken, regionalism formed a critical juncture in the
The Delmarva poultry industry successfully manipulated provincial competition to promote its own association with health and wellness. By characterizing its own people as hard-working American farmers, Delmarva both affirmed its own poultry as uniquely wholesome and not so subtly defamed southern competitors. In a speech reaffirming Perdue’s commitment to Delmarva, Frank Perdue described the struggle: “Competition between us and the south is not between companies or products, but rather between the people who make up the business.” In order to maintain its national presence, Perdue and many other members believed it was critical that Delmarva continued to expand its operations: “We say Delmarva cannot afford not to expand. If we are going to keep this business virile, we need to make the industry stronger.” As the economic lifeblood of the region, industry supporters needed to remain forward thinking and on guard.

In the end though, Frank Perdue and others were ultimately confident that the innate quality of Delmarva and its people would continue its leadership in poultry production. On one hand, industry members believed that their region’s farmers possessed more fertile land, better know-how, and greater management skills than those of other broiler growing areas. This stemmed from the perception that Delmarva’s people held intrinsic characteristics that other regions lacked. Paul Phillips, head of the Delmarva Poultry Industry grower committee, an employee of Dow chemical, and close associate with Frank Perdue, discussed his thoughts on the subject, “The stock of the Delmarva peninsula area is what we would call the heartwood of

714 Delmarva is a name given to peninsula that occupies parts of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia and falls within the Atlantic Coastal Plain.
America's family tree. Enterprising, aggressive, stable people that have shared their knowhow and knowledge of poultry production with the world. People have initiated the role of chicken from a Sunday luxury to a food staple in the world's food basket.” Speaking at the Poultry Workers Conference in 1964, Phillips expressed what many in the region believed: that Delmarva’s people were uniquely qualified for this particular occupation. The generalization of the region and its people were one of the reasons that Perdue and others felt confident in the future of their regional power, even during economic downturns or periods of problematic production. It was a belief that bled into advertising claims, making Delmarva as much “chicken country” as Iowa was “America’s heartland.”

Conversely, while Delmarva’s Poultry Industry depicted its growers as enterprising individuals, its competitors in the South displayed many negative qualities. Beyond the longstanding cultural biases against people of the rural South (including assumptions of ignorance and laziness compounded by ingrained poverty), the growing competition between Delmarva and the South for poultry supremacy led to a negative view of Southern chicken. Unlike their farmers and broiler processors, industry members in Delmarva argued that southern growers lacked both the skill and innovative spirit necessary to make a good product. In 1964, Frank Perdue bragged that his growers averaged $2000 more in farm income than similar farmers in the South. In another speech, Frank Perdue blamed the processors in the South for problems

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720 The Delmarva Poultry Industry played a large role in supporting these claims, including hosting an annual chicken festival that attracted tourists and industry members alike.
within the industry as a whole, stating, “I think this is partly because the broiler business nationwide is getting more into the hands of financially stable companies which make decisions based on an intelligent appraisal of the important economic facts as compared to the haremscareem decisions made by half-bankrupt, inefficient companies of the past.”

Part of the problem extended from assumptions of general dirtiness and disease found in Southern climates. Paul Phillips, on advice from Frank Perdue, noted the difference between Delmarva and the South on disease control, insinuating that Southern chicken was more likely to be weak and unhealthy. Despite not working directly for the company, Phillips’ loyalty to Delmarva influenced how he and many others thought about the region’s commodities and the quality of its competitors.

**The Family**

Along with an imagined heartland, agribusinesses also emphasized an idealized vision of the American family. Their marketing campaigns often projected images of families to conceal the corporate presence in agriculture. This focus on familial production of food and fiber was part of the overall marketing strategy, a façade that was meant to fuse social desire for wholesomeness with the totality of the agribusiness’ process. The key was blurring the understanding of who exactly was driving production. Of course families (farm and not) still played a serious role in the food system. However, agribusiness deliberately conflated their industrial operations with these small-time familial actions, attempting to exploit public responses to cultural triggers. Through advertising, these corporations tried to elicit the same reaction by presenting their business through a more pleasant and palatable lens of an idealized family. It was an essential part of making this trope work. If consumers believed that families

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were the main producers of food and fiber, they could conceivably ignore the corporate network behind these efforts. Just as the heartland theme focused on an imagined version of agricultural environments, so too would this theme confine itself to a middle class ideal of the nuclear family.

This simplified and glorified version of family held the same values triumphed by so many in the postwar era. Each of these projections assumed many of the features of middle class living, including the nuclear structure, expectations of consumerism, strict divide between work and leisure time, public and private sphere, access to educational opportunities, greater economic security, and home ownership. Not only did the family shape take on the standard father-mother-two-kids formula, but the roles of each member had a similar value. Father played the role of breadwinner and patriarch, steward of the family’s economic wellbeing and ultimate authority. Mother confined herself to the household, taking care of the children and maintaining a healthy living space for her family. Children were meant to experience the carefree and innocent existence of a long childhood, free of the responsibilities of labor and adult worries. Of course, people were well aware of these as ideals rather than reality, but that does not mean they were not expectations and guideposts for how families should arrange themselves and act in wider society. In fact, their role as ideal made them all the more powerful. This was a conception to reach for, a goal for all families and an expectation that all were judged by. Its place as an American paradigm made it an attractive marketing option for companies.\footnote{May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 14-19 and 155-166.}

Businesses that retailed directly to the wider public found this idealism a critical component of successful campaigns. Many advertisements centered directly on an association between family and food. This took on many different forms of interactions, from mealtime, to actual preparation, supermarket shopping, and other distinct family exchanges and celebrations.
All of these centered on an idealized vision of a middle class family unit producing or consuming food. Hormel’s Spam and other canned meat ads frequently showed different members of the family enjoying the products. One boasted that the kids never got sick of Spam because of its versatility. Another noted that the husband who used to be grumpy in morning now looked forward to his breakfast Spam. Wilson’s meat product Mor, a similar commodity, ran a campaign promising that kids would love their product. It was a strategy that Oscar Mayer built its wiener empire on, using children as powerful symbols of product enjoyment.

While plenty of advertisements focused on the husband or children, many companies also highlighted the role of wife/mother as the primary consumer. Armour, Wilson, and Cudahy all ran advertisements showing a happy wife buying and preparing their meat products. For example, one 1948 issue of the *Ladies Home Journal* had no less than three competing advertisements all featuring a woman preparing a delicious meaty meal for her family.726 Although these advertisements were created by different companies, most direct competitors for the same customer dollar, they all expressed similar assumptions about America’s family life. The husband/father and children were freed from meal preparation altogether. Children’s preferences were given top priority. The wife/mother freely bought and happily prepared the meals. The assumption that Americans would identify with these social roles was a major part of their appeal.

Other companies utilized “family occasions” as a marketing ploys. Holidays, parties, and barbeques all offered perfect settings to craft a wholesome image of families enjoying these products. A Perdue radio ad commented that, “If you are like my family, chances are you cook outdoors on a regular basis during these warm evenings. Our favorite main-stay is barbecued

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726 *Ladies Home Journal* 65, no. 2 (February 1948), 109, 112, and 220.
chicken. It's economical too as good quality Perdue broilers cost far less.”

Several years later, Rath articulated a similar vision in their advertisements for holiday hams, “Holidays are home cookin' times, when the family gathers around a table filled good food. And Rath is in the center of it all with picture-perfect mouth-watering hams that make the meal.”

Another advertisement assured housewives that their reputation was “safe with us” as long as they used Rath’s hickory ham. Each one of these promotions offered a plethora of family-centered images for the companies to rally around. As an illustration, they each reflected the pleasure the family would receive by buying these products. But more than that, they each concealed corporate food network behind the façade of the family. Perdue, Rath, Hormel, and other packers wanted customers to first association their products with wholesome family life that aligned with middle class values and expectations.

Rath’s early to mid-1970s television commercials perfectly encapsulated this normative family experience. Still fighting to stay viable in an increasingly competitive market, the company commissioned a series of TV commercials. The thirty-second stories showcased a number of family-centered activities. One presented a family hiking together through the woods, only to stop and enjoy Rath lunch meat in a picnic. Others featured a similar narrative, with fishing and picnicking replacing the hiking. Another showed a growing boy waking up in the middle of the night to share a midnight snack with his father. All of these commercials intertwined family time with Rath’s products. Yet, no commercial signified this theme better than Rath’s 1974 Breakfast Bacon commercial. The advertisement started with a young farm boy

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729 Rath Packing Company, “Iowa Sends her Best TV commercial—Hiking,” circa mid-1970s, Series 8, Box 20, File 151, Rath Packing Records.
collecting eggs from a chicken coop. Intercut were images of his mother cooking Rath bacon. The commercial then jumped to the farmwife serving the bacon to her husband/farmer and two children. Throughout the commercial, a jingle played in the background, “To all you folks through out our land, Iowa sends her best. With plain good eatin meats from Rath, Iowa sends her best. Rath was born in the great Midwest where the corn grows tall and the meats are the best. Iowa sends you Rath, Iowa sends her best.” This commercial represented many of the features that that these companies publicized: a contented family, with the appropriate roles, and an idealized setting, fulfilled by these products. Rath positioned its products as the source of satisfaction, but not its corporate process as the creator. The key was to show Americans what they wanted.

Although many input companies did not sell to the same customer base as food processors and retailers, they also used a similar image of the happy nuclear family and its contribution to food production. Many implement dealers leaned on familiar images of wholesome families as part of their advertising schemes at the midcentury. In an advertisement for John Deere’s Model 70 tractor, a farmer and his faithful dog gazed wistfully across at a tractor. Massey-Ferguson’s 1961 tractor ad for Successful Farming featured a parade of tractors rolling through a small town, children excitingly chasing after the machines. In other advertisements, children and family projected a picturesque vision of rural life. Introducing the Cub tractor in 1947, International Harvester advertised that its new tractor brought the “Farmall” system to the small family farm. One advertisement emphasized the tractor’s family-friendly

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nature by showcasing a young boy riding the machine, his beaming father proudly watching.\textsuperscript{734} A year earlier, Minneapolis-Moline used the theme of familial responsibility as a key part of their anti-erosion campaign.\textsuperscript{735} Nearly ten years later, Minneapolis-Moline would continue to draw the connection between Americana and farm families. One 1955 advertisement announced, ‘the kids can’t wait to take over!’ Showing a picturesque farm (complete with fertile fields, well-equipped barn, and the All-American nuclear family), Minneapolis-Moline reminded customers that, “power-matched machines open a whole new future of progress and plenty for the boys and girls who stay on the land to become tomorrow’s farmers.”\textsuperscript{736} These advertisements were meant to provide an impression of wholesome and normative values, a life that the customers wanted to believe existed.

Input companies also used the trappings of a happy nuclear family to describe various parts of their corporate structure. Both John Deere and International Harvester stressed that many of their relationships with their dealers were inter-generational. In one Deere publication, the company boasted that 24\% of their dealerships were operated by father-son teams. This messaging implied that these dealers were passed down through the generations, just like the farmsteads they supplied. The implement manufacturer underlined that these men were essential parts of their community, locals that lived and worked in these community spaces, “He is not outsider peddling his goods for everything he can get. He is no fly-by-nighter hopping from one community to another to skim off the economic ‘cream.’ The typical John Deere Dealer has roots in the community he serves. He raises and educates his children there. He enters into community,
church, and school activities. More often than not, he is one of the community's leaders.” In
stressing this, Deere once again looked to draw a link between themselves, families, and tight-knit
communities. The company concealed itself under the motif of home and community.
International promoted a similar version of their salesmen’s network. The company insisted that
their dealerships were a “friendly landmark,” like the community school or post office and the
men who served them were part of the neighborhood. The company’s 1952 annual report also
publicized their connection to family dealerships. It revealed a heartwarming story of the
Grigsbys, a multi-generational family of Kentucky salesmen who began selling International
fifty years prior and continued to pass down the tradition from father to son. These companies
hoped to associate the familial traditions of farmers with their own employees, further blurring
the lines between farming and their corporations.

Seed houses like Pioneer and DeKalb also sought in ensure their customers and
dealerships that their contracted salesmen were part of a “wholesome” family system. Company
publications and corporate-sponsored events would often highlight family as a critical part of the
overall focus of the company. Pioneer’s monthly publication, Kernels, had a special section
completely dedicated to family, reporting births, marriages, deaths, and other family-related
events. When the company added a flock of new salesmen in the late fifties, regional managers
insisted that these dealers report family and community-related information, including their
involvement with children’s groups, volunteer organizations, and church. Corporate events

737 John Deere, “Makers of Plenty: John Deere…the man and the company,” 1962, 22, Box 551, File 08816,
International Harvester Central File.
738 International Harvester, “Farming with the Farmall cub,” Circa late 1940s, 46-47, Box 520, File 2375,
International Harvester Central File.
Central File, accessed online (November 23, 2017),
740 Letter to Field Men, January 1959, Box 7, File 51, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
and sales drives also took on the gloss of family involvement even as the company looked to confine women to a smaller realm of influence. Regional sales meetings were often joint-affairs between husbands and wives.\(^{741}\) Company prizes and gifts, including Thanksgiving turkeys, kitchenware, and free aprons, frequently appealed to various members of the family or supported family-related activities.\(^{742}\)

Outside of their dealerships, Pioneer and other agri-companies were also quick to showcase their support of rural families through sponsorship of children organizations. Obviously many agribusinesses were well aware of the importance of paying lip-service to this kind of support.\(^{743}\) It was a tactic that Pioneer pursued with zeal. Out of all the community support leant by the company between the years 1950 and 1970, contributions to groups like 4-H, FFA, and various vocational-agriculture programs far outweighed the rest. These contributions took on many forms, from a ten dollar ad in an FFA calendar to sending trick pencils for a club meeting. Pioneer even supplied Vo-Ag programs with a short video “The Grain that Built a Hemisphere,” a Disney short that celebrated the utility of corn and the importance of hybridization. The company donated trophies to state corn champions, awards specifically adorned with “presented by Pioneer.” Perhaps one of the most telling signs of Pioneer’s commitment to children’s marketing was that they sponsored contests only for children, not adults.\(^{744}\) Pioneer provided two seven pound bags of seed to any children engaged in vocational

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\(^{741}\) Letter to Pioneer Indiana Salesmen, August 18, 1964, Box 9, File 52, Pioneer Eastern Division Records

\(^{742}\) Letter to Salesmen, October 24, 1958, Box 7, File 49, Pioneer Eastern Division Records; Letter to Farm Journal from Pioneer Eastern Division, May 21, 1964, Box 9, File 2, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.


agriculture projects. The only guideline the company required for participation was that the children plant hybrid competitors next to Pioneer’s seed.\textsuperscript{745}

Each one of these advertisements, promotions, and events were part of a larger marketing façade that connected corporations to wholesome family sustainment. International Harvester highlighted the family-nature of their dealerships because it was easier to market than discussing their labor problems, the slowdown in farm implements sales, or the capitalistic and increasingly technical nature of agriculture. Rath featured a happy farm family eating eggs because it was more appealing than showcasing an industrial meat plant that slaughtered hogs, processed their carcasses, and canned them in tiny packages bound for customers thousands of miles away. Families were integral to food production, but were hardly the movers and shakers in a rapidly centralizing and industrializing food economy. It was corporations that controlled and often drove these changes. Families were wholesome. Corporate entities were not. All of these efforts were meant to craft and sustain a certain kind of image, one that was easier to sell and simpler to hide behind.

**Nostalgia**

In the end though, perhaps no other sub-theme was more integral to this marketing trope than an emphasis on nostalgia. If “the heartland” was to connect vitality to an agricultural setting and “the family” was to associate food production and consumption with the wholesomeness of the postwar family unit, then “nostalgia” was meant to tap into wider social longings for the simplified past and beliefs in the innate goodness of the American countryside. A strange brew of nationalism, homesickness for a past age, and a jeremiad for an imagined past, nostalgia associated nicely with cultural understandings of rural spaces, rural people and agriculture in

\textsuperscript{745} Letter to Lawrence Scholl from R.A. Bibbins, March 2, 1955, Box 2, File 23, Pioneer Eastern Division Records.
general. Using Norman Rockwell-esque pictures and selective memory, agribusinesses celebrated farmers as ideal Americans and rural spaces as tranquil gateways to a lost past. This sub-theme provided excellent concealment to the material change actually taking place within the food chain.

Nostalgia, as a conception, has been defined as, “a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth).” Many academic studies indicated a strong emotional response tied to nostalgia in advertising. As early as 1943, scholars interested in marketing began to study the effects of nostalgia on consumer preferences. Nearly five decades later, scholars William Havlena and Susan Holak found that advertising could evoke positive recall in response to past associations. They maintained, “The products themselves may also engender nostalgic emotions during consumption, allowing consumers to ‘re-experience’ aspects of their past or to experience the collective past of the society vicariously through fantasy in much the same manner as Disney's Main Street U.S.A. allows visitors to ‘experience’ as small town America that never really existed.”

In many ways, these advertisers were merely tapping into America’s generalized anxiety about modernization and fear of past values being lost. Nostalgia functioned as a sort of redeemer of virtues in peril, a belief that older traditions still held relevance and could be

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747 Although Howard Hovde did not specifically address nostalgia, his emphasis on the need for the “marketing man” to take advantage of wartime feelings of community dislocation and provide a sense of planned stability elicits a similar theme, Howard T. Hovde, “The Marketing Viewpoint in Planning for Community Betterment,” *Journal of Marketing* 7, no. 4 (1943): 337-41.
retained through consumption. One of the most popular TV shows of all time, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, succeed because it offered its viewers a reaffirmation traditional American values. The Hillbillies presented a lost world based on community and egalitarianism, while also presenting a critique of post-war consumption and affluence.\(^{749}\) The culture wars of the late 1980s and 90s were partly based on nostalgic visions of family life, with many politicians and social commentators gaining popularity through their repeated calling for an unrealized past.\(^{750}\)

In her study of homesickness in American history, Susan Matt discussed how the advent of nostalgia coincided with Gilded Age industrialization and the continued disruption of older ways of life. Family reunions, “hometown days,” and local festivals offered momentary respite in the form of consumable leisure. Or as Matt argued, “the same technologies that had brought them home had also disrupted traditional way of life. Home was gone, lost in the past. And while space could be traversed, time could not. This realization was at the heart of what we now call nostalgia.”\(^{751}\)

One way that these companies employed this theme was through idealized images of country life. Obviously agribusinesses did not hold a monopoly on idyllic images as marketing tools. Plenty of other industries also employed these kind of designs to sell their products. But businesses involved in the food production especially found nostalgia an easy device to convey their marketing message. After the Second World War, the meat packing giant Swift embarked on a marketing campaign that offered consumers a chance to revisit the past through the consumption of their product. Calling their campaign, “Great American Customs,” Swift

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advertisements celebrated blissful small town events and the place of meat products within them. One featured a nuclear family (white and middle-class) walking into a fair, leading to a delightful picnic with Swift luncheon meats. Another presented a town enjoying a holiday parade, with a family grilling hot dogs as part of their 4th of July tradition. The tagline boldly asserted, “Great American Customs: Holiday Parades [A Day At The Fair]…And Holiday Picnics with Swift’s Premium Franks [Table-Ready Meats].” The association, of course, was meant to insinuate that Swift was an essential part of retaining tradition. Customs and rituals that Americans used to glorify the past and celebrate the present were innately tied to the consumption of these products. All of these images, though clearly idealized, nevertheless conveyed important messages about the connections between companies, agricultural production, and the past. They insinuated that these products (and by extension the agribusinesses themselves) were innate parts of recalling this idyllic system, as traditional as mom and apple pie. It also projected the sense that these companies were always present in American history. The past, glorified and made simple, could be used to further draw the association between nostalgic interpretations of the past and corporations.

One of the most prominent marketing methods both now and then, nostalgia uniquely appealed to agribusinesses in the postwar period for a number of different reasons. Rewriting the historical narrative certainly allowed food companies to exalt corporate innovations, insinuating that these advancements created abundance without breaking the bank. Conversely, it allowed retailers to conceal events or trends (like unsanitary environments or protracted conflicts with labor) that would hurt their public image. Yet, perhaps most importantly, nostalgia allowed these companies subvert the expectations of the consumer. Instead of a large, seemingly unfeeling

corporation operating thousands of miles away, nostalgia put a human face on an inhuman institution. It masked corporatization under the guise of a romanticized past. Looking to evoke strong emotion, nostalgia was an essential part of agribusinesses’ bait and switch platform. By baiting customers into satisfying their longing for an unrealized past, consumers actually bought into an increasingly corporatized system based on efficiency, vertical integration, and large bureaucracies. These two seemingly opposed conceptions were nevertheless intertwined through the use of nostalgia.

As a tool for retailers, nostalgia was an essential part of creating an attractive selling narrative for their customers. Or as one Perdue marketing proposal explained, “Remembrance is vital in telling a selling story. Historical projection will increase recall.” Rath Packing did this in several different ways. Sometimes the company advertised its use of “old-fashioned” processing methods, hoping its emphasis would symbolize old-time quality. In one 1973 advertising proposal aimed at Safeway Foods, the packer promised a unique hickory flavor to their bacon, claiming, “At Rath we still cure our bacon the slow old backwoods way, over smoldering hickory.” Another television commercial featured a company smokemaster standing in a smoky room, noting that the Rath bacon was still smoked the old-fashioned way.

Much earlier, Rath sought to sell nostalgia through a series of advertisements in Life Magazine. Throughout the summer of 1955, Rath’s Daintees (a canned ham) appeared in full color, surrounded by orange slices and different historic objects. Along with these symbols of citric freshness, Rath guaranteed that those, “Unique elements such as the old-fashioned mantle clock

and apothecaries scales make Rath Advertising different from other meat ads.”

A year later, the company applied the same reasoning to another bacon promotion, asserting, “The use of old-fashioned articles help attract the reader’s eye…the old coffee grinder…mittens…cup and a checkerboard table cloth are combined to call attention to the bacon platter and the Black Hawk Bacon package.”

Not content to leave nostalgia on the pages, Rath even created a storewide event that played on longing for the past. Titled, “Old Fashioned Values,” Rath proposed that stores drum up excitement by hosting different “historic” in-store activities, including an old fashioned dress contest, best beard contest, buggy rides, or square dance. The packer suggested that the grocery store create fake, old-fashioned posters (featuring Rath’s products of course) to bring in more customers. Ultimately, the event promised an, “Early American Atmosphere spiced with modern day food bargains.” Unsurprisingly, there was no evidence that Rath’s proposal gained much traction among grocery stores. In the end, the use of nostalgia, while seemingly obvious in its imagery and wording, was actually quite subtle in its intention. Marketers looked to cultivate positive memories and draw association between remembrances of the past with their own brand. In this way, the product itself was not necessarily the most important object the customer bought, but rather the “feeling” or attribute gained by its consumption. Campaigns built on nostalgia therefore promised to achieve both a “soft” sell subtle enough linger and the recall necessary to make it work.

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What was unique about these uses of nostalgia was not just that they sought to recall a romanticized past, but also an imagined place as well. Companies sought to harness the public’s imagination of rural spaces, driving a link between nostalgia for the past, cultural assumptions about the countryside, and their branded products. Retailers used this assumption of place and time to sell everything from “old-style” ice cream to home-cured, country hams. Introducing their new frozen meat balls, Rath advertised that, “Our Home Economist, Ruth Chambers, gleaned the country cookbooks for the finest old-fashioned, home-made style of meat balls.”

Another Rath advertisement claimed to be a celebration of old-time picnics, announcing, “For we’ve taken the best of that good farm-wife's recipe, added touches of our own and turned out a sausage elegant enough for the most uppity company.” Rath’s competitors also played on this connection. Roegelein, a meat packer out of Texas, based many of its advertising campaigns on the promise that their product recipes were handed down from an older generation, carefully preserving “old-country” flavor and freshness. This drew on the enduring association between rurality and the past.

It was nostalgia’s connection to the past and romantic agrarianism that gave it such strength in the realm of advertising. Companies already attempted to manipulate understandings of the past, present, and future to serve their agricultural needs. It was hardly a stretch then that these entities would also seek to use other cultural talismans rooted in historical memory to sell their products and conceal their presence. And no talisman was more attractive to agribusinesses than the American farmer. At an agribusiness seminar in 1968, Seth Shaw acknowledged that

changes were anxiety-producing and that, “the family farm and the simple service trades of the town; and the church which was the center of the social as well as the religious life, all loom large in our dream. We do not want to see this pass away.”

Strong, hardy and fundamentally good, these rural people were ideal characters in the advertising narrative companies attempted to weave. They already held a cultural capital, had a deep connection to America’s sense of place and memory, and positive associations with the values of enterprise and decency. The American Way of Farming intertwined all three of the themes, the heartland, the family, and nostalgia, to create an infinitely marketable trope that rest quite comfortably on the laurels of romantic agrarianism.

Welcome to the American Way of Farming

In the winter of 1957, the American Farm Economics Association held their annual dinner meeting. Chosen to speak that night was Bushrod Allin, a longtime USDA employee and the chairman of the department’s Outlook and Situation Board. As an economist, Allin opened his speech by addressing a “the farm problem,” though it was perhaps not one his colleagues were keenly aware of. Instead of discussing a sluggish farm economy, the Cold War, or rural depopulation, Allin called for something new in the agricultural sector, public relations. He argued that the American public lacked a concrete understanding of agriculture, including its problems and needs. He stated

If I know any fact other than those I can see, hear, smell, taste or touch, it is the fact that Americans are inclined to regard favorably our free, efficient, individualistic, family farmer [his emphasis] who owns, manages, and does manual labor on his farm. Poets and philosophers have sung his praises from our earliest times. And many of our farmers do

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meet these specifications. But even though in very many instances this affection is bestowed upon real people, it is largely an affection for an abstract ideal inherited from our past when farming was more a way of life than a modern business. This particular ideal—this romanticized image—has great public appeal, especially to nonfarm people, so much so that the image itself is sometimes a substantive problem in arriving at workable solutions to the real-life problems of farmers.763

Allin’s solution to this problem was public relations, reeducating the inward facing public on the reality of farm life. This would, he claimed, help create mutual understanding and respect.

Allin’s assessment of the American public’s view of agriculture, the glorification of the farmer, was also noticed by other agricultural observers of the day. Constitutional scholar Charles Hardin commented that no other group, “has been the subject of as much idolatry and contempt as the hayseedy son of honest toil and sweat, the noble yokel, the independent and thoughtful clodhopper, the bucolic philosopher, the industrious sucker, the indispensable hick, and the God-fearing, hell-fire-and-brimstone breathing last stronghold of woolhatted democracy.”764 Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman questioned whether or not American public fully appreciated farmers and their production, asking for greater understanding of the issues facing agriculture.765 While Freeman questioned how much the consumer truly understood the agricultural economy, he perhaps should have directed his questions towards himself. After all, could he fully appreciate how far public imagination had wandered away from reality in such a short amount of time? Did Freeman truly expect the consumer, the individual who engaged in agriculture only in the most superficial of ways, to somehow understand the industrialization of

the countryside? From that point of view, it was Freeman who had lost touch, not the American masses.

Not all were so easily befuddled by the radical reconstruction and disconnection happening in America’s food and fiber system. Morton Rothstein, an agricultural historian and longstanding editor for *Agricultural History*, placed these changes in historical context during his presidential address for the society in 1975. He remarked that, “many of the profound changes in American agriculture that are a source of pride for some commentators in the abundance obtained, and a source of fear and concern for others.” Yet, Rothstein believed that many of these changes were just part of a larger and historic transformation of agriculture, that the disputes over land, technology, governmental policies, and allocation of resources were infinite and constant through our history.\(^\text{766}\) How typical that it would be an agricultural historian, not a farmer, agricultural expert, or policy-maker, that would identify these changes and place them in an appropriate line of America’s agriculture past. That Rothstein tried to historicize alterations to postwar agriculture is not surprisingly, given his occupation. That he was wrong is also unsurprising. Humans often fail to adequately conceive of the vast transformations in their own life, especially ones where the consequences were far-flung and obscured by the sheer size of the change. That fact of the matter is, both the material reality that Rothstein, Allin, Hardin, and Freeman discussed and the ideological simplification evoked by agribusinesses intertwined to form a startlingly new period of American agriculture.

What was new were not the forces of a wider bureaucracy seeking to impose its vision, nor the technological and scientific advancements that made it possible. Consumerism, convenience, and an emphasis on a business mindset had all been emphasized before in

agriculture. And traditional cultural assumptions of farming had long stressed its wholesome nature. No, what was truly unique was the inherent contradiction that lay at the heart of postwar agriculture. It was the divorce of reality from ideology. The public believed in agriculture’s wholesomeness and its timeless nature. Material changes told a different story, one where agriculture became more industrial, more capitalistic, and encompassed by corporations. And yet, though fundamentally different, both conceptions seemed to exist without great tension. Ultimately, this resulted in greater institutional control over not just the physical food chain, but also over how Americans thought of their agricultural system.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Let us imagine, somewhere in south-central Iowa, in the mid-summer of 2017, a litter of pigs was born. The farm itself was average sized, around 442 acres, and specialized. It primarily focused on a farrow to finish hog production, developing the piglet to adult in about six months. To support this operation, fields of chemically fertilized hybrid corn and soybeans rounded out the outfit. Cloistered in a confinement crate and shielded from their mother’s bulk by metal prongs, the litter of nine lived there for three weeks. The litter then moved to the nursing barn. They would soon join other piglets in large, temperature-controlled stalls. Feasting on a mixture of corn, soy, food additives, and vitamins, the piglets remained confined for another six to eight weeks. The growing pigs would watch the human laborers monitor their process: measuring their weight gain, vaccinating to guard against disease, and inspecting for possible inflection. Once the pigs reacted an ideal weight of fifty to sixty pounds, these same laborers would drive the pigs into the finishing building. There the pigs would add muscle quickly, the specifically bred biology making it difficult to distinguish one long, lean body from another. By the time they weighed two hundred and eighty pounds, the pigs were ready for market. The farmer and the other laborers would move the hogs into a waiting semi-truck. The hogs were sold directly to Tyson, one of the largest meat packers in the world.

From there, the semi would drive the hogs to Waterloo, Iowa. Located just southeast of a massive John Deere factory, the pigs would be unloaded at pork processing plant. Built by Iowa Beef Processors in 1990, the plant helped ease the sting of losing Rath in 1985. Tyson bought the plant in 2001, and with tax incentives from the city, expanded the operation in 2017. With over
2,900 employees, the plant processed 19,500 hogs each day. The pigs were moved into a holding pen and rested for an hour or so before being directed towards the CO2 chamber. The stunned hogs would then be killed by a quick, sharp jab to the neck, causing the carcass to bleed profusely. The hanging hogs would next be ducked into a scalding tank. Their softened bristles would then be removed by the de-hairing and singed by machine. Workers would next remove the head, the entrails, and feet in a series of steps before the most skilled laborer would split the carcass in half. Finally, the freshly separated body would be blast chilled and placed in a cooler.

After twenty-four hours, the disassembly process would begin in earnest. The carcass moved onto the cutting floor and the first major section, “the main break.” Here, workers separated the carcass into five different parts (ham, picnic, butt, belly, and the trim). While the other cuts were bound for different product lines, the conveyor belt tossed pork belly into a tumbler. The newly softened cut then traveled through an automated de-skinner and was further hand trimmed by workers. After being injected with a brine solution, the belly moved into the drench cabinet. The belly would be then baked at a low temperature and then hung in an industrial cooler. Frozen into slabs, the bellies were now the ideal firmness for automatic slicing into uniform cuts of bacon. Reloaded onto another conveyor belt, the slabs were sliced, microwaved, inspected, vacuumed packaged, and sealed for travel.

Finally, the packaged bacon would be packed onto refrigerated truck units and shipped to supermarkets across the country. Arriving at its stop in Ames, Iowa, supermarket employees unloaded the truck and stocked the newly arrived bacon in the supermarket’s meat cooler near the cheese, milk, and other perishables. There, the bacon would rest nestled next to its Hormel,

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Oscar Meyer, and Smithfield competitors. Until at last, a woman, perhaps taken by bright red packaging or (more likely) with the price, would choose that particular package, check out her groceries, and drive home. There, the woman opened the package and placed the pre-cooked bacon on a plate. Though not as tasty as a baked ham or convenient as a drive through sandwich from McDonalds, the bacon would make for a suitably quick meal for a hungry family.

Suppose too that this imagined woman was not the only customer investigating the packaged meats that day. I was there, surveying the bacon and looking around at the seemingly numerous choices. It is a bounty that almost appears unreal at times. A seemingly infinite amount of products offers the customer an endless amount of choice at a convenience my grandmother could only dream of and a cost that would cause my great-great grandfather (the butcher) to faint. In the seventy-five-plus years since his death, the food chain and the agricultural network that supply it have been transformed in immeasurable ways. Everything has changed.

While there are many reasons for these changes, the massive expansion of agribusiness during the post period undoubtedly influenced the transformation of our food chain. Their ability to manipulate how people created, consumed, and conceived of food and fiber was profound. Agribusinesses used many different tools and methods to alter the system to their liking. Modifying conceptions of the past, present, and future helped them claim ownership over progress. Postwar pressures allowed agricultural corporations the opportunity to introduce new standards of identity to members of the rural community. Their focus on scientific and technological control transferred ownership of knowledge away from the public and toward the private. Agribusiness also used the expectations of the postwar middle class to increase
consumption of their goods and assure their dominance in retail. In the end, all of these radical changes hid behind a banal version of rurality. “The American Way of Farming” made the food and fiber system more stratified, industrial, and capitalistic while presenting a different image of wholesomeness. Nevertheless the effort succeed by speaking two different languages at the same time.

Agribusinesses undertook these measures with the goal of essentialization. By manipulating conceptions of agriculture and the way people (both farming population and the public at large) thought about it, agribusinesses helped construct a system that wholly depended on private entities to exist. Agribusinesses wanted to make themselves indispensable to the food chain’s functionality without provoking mass consternation from the public. They desired to incorporate not just their products into agriculture, but their methodology and expertise as well. Though individuals might question their presence, agribusinesses wanted to be accepted as an elementary part of the rural community. Agribusinesses also hoped to instill new values into every societal level of agriculture, from changing the outlook of individual farm children involved in a 4-H contest to altering customer habits and taste. Agribusinesses sought to remake the material reality of the food chain, all while restructuring the metaphysical conceptions that surrounded agricultural production.

In many ways, these agribusinesses achieved their goal. Agribusiness has become an inescapable part of agriculture, consumption, knowledge commodification, and the corporate political economy. As private entities, agribusinesses grew smaller in number but more powerful in scope. Both economically and politically, these firms often organized together to further their interests and crush any threats to their position at the top of the food chain. And even as these companies tightened in number, very few of these corporations have actually “died.” Most were
merely bought out and incorporated into other firms. This has led to greater integration of connected industries by a single corporate institution. For example, at one time or another, the chemical giant DuPont has been involved in the production of pharmaceuticals, textiles, and fossil fuels. With its merger with Dow chemical, DuPont now holds a stake in nearly every application of biotechnology in agriculture. This deal has only recently been surpassed by the buyout of Monsanto by Bayer, a move that will combine two of the world’s top three bio-chemical companies together. The results of these unifications are “mega” corporations that will shape the future direction of the world’s food supply. These companies already indirectly control much of the agricultural production in North America and Europe. They are now, slowly but surely, making inroads in Africa, South America, and Asia. This global expansion challenges decolonization efforts, often replacing older forms of state imperialism with equally harmful capitalist practices. As agribusinesses conquered western agriculture, they have now turned their attention to the world at large.

Ironically, this development has coincided with disappearance of these companies from much of the public eye. As food production became more and more segmented, fewer people were aware of the reach of these companies. It is a reticence that was actively encouraged by companies, who saw silence about their practices as way to deflect attention and criticism. The commodification of knowledge also helped dampen possible resistance from consumers and academics alike. The illusion of choice limited organization among consumer activists. As state support for colleges and universities decreased, scholars became progressively more dependent on funding from corporate sponsors. In the end, these corporate entities have become invisible aspects of American life, making it more difficult to separate their desires from our reality.
The transformation of the food chain and the full integration of corporate agriculture have had a multitude of material consequences in our world. In comparison to 1940, let alone 1900, how America produces and eats today is vastly different. The countryside has been altered beyond measure. Fewer farms dot the landscape, but of those that do, they are larger, specialized, and far more commercialized than in the past.\(^{768}\) Agricultural operations depend more heavily on input commodities like hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizer, and pesticide. Machinery has only grown larger and more computerized to handle greater acreage and production. Livestock operations are now efficiently streamlined and carefully segmented to achieve maximum growth in the shortest amount of time. These changes are much more evolutionary than revolutionary.

As historian Douglas Hurt noted, these changes were built on the achievements of the past, rather than a new series of technological innovations.\(^{769}\) In many ways, the current system has achieved the goals set by past bureaucrats. Efficient, productive, and controlled by institutional experts, the farm seems to have finally, at least to some, reached an industrial ideal.

However, it is a system that still contains deep rooted problems, particularly with issues that beset the farm population. Adoption of the industrial ideal and its scientific methods have exacerbated issues of overproduction. Low commodity prices (driven partly by the demands of corporate consumers), along with rising operational costs, have caught many farmers in a perpetual price squeeze, much like the ones that plagued their parents and grandparents. And like their older family members, governmental entities have failed to not only address these problems, but have often supported policies and institutions that benefit from overproduction.


Government subsidies overwhelmingly went to large-scale operators. Farm programs have done little to combat cycles of farm recessions. Perhaps the most problematic issue is the gradual loss of institutional control by farmers themselves. In both practice and knowledge, outside experts have commodified the intellectual properties of agriculture. Not only do these experts control the flow and price of input and output commodities, they are often the loudest voices involved in discussion of the agricultural future. Debt and contract farming threaten possibilities of new directions. The once politically powerful farm bloc has dissolved. These problems have driven away farmers and sped depopulation of the countryside.

The consequences of these actions stretch beyond the agribusiness or even the farmer. These changes have also had profound effects on rural communities throughout the nation. The breakdown of local exchange and the displacement of rural people (especially in the global South) constricted economic sustainability of rural spaces. Poverty has always been an ingrained part of life in the countryside, a reality that fell substantially as more subsistence farmers left in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, despite the presence of a few well-off operators and the lingering promise of integrating rural areas into a national industrial economy, rural poverty rates have hovered between fifteen and twenty percent of the population since the late 1960s. Lack of educational and employment opportunities triggered a brain drain from these spaces. Many local stores and businesses have closed because of depopulation. Economic stresses helped fuel drug crises. In order to kept their overhead cost low, many farmers and other food production businesses came to rely increasingly on migrant labor. The result is an exploitive system of labor that depends on injustice and dependence to function.

In the larger view, agribusiness was fundamental to the story of consolidation in America. As the twentieth century marched onward, institutional forces attempted to produce a consolidated understanding of culture, social values, and normalized behavior. These powers sought to integrate values that support bureaucratic and capitalistic structures and expertise. Agribusiness helped centralized structures of the state and corporations to rural spaces. By undermining older configurations of exchange and rural life, agribusiness forced a new reliance on outside forces for economic sustenance. Beyond government subsidies (which are substantial), rural areas are now more reliant than ever on the “Walmart Economy.” These areas are particularly vulnerable to financial exploitation because they lack the ability to balance the power of these external forces. Distance limits the range of choice for rural consumers and employees alike. Lack of numbers and the threat of corporate shut-downs leave laborers susceptible to misuse. In terms of consumption, agribusinesses have helped solidify the disconnection between rurality and many Americans, between the food we produce and the food we consume. In this way, we truly are what we eat.
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