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The organized corn husking contests: conduits of industrial culture in the rural Midwest, 1922-1941

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The organized corn husking contests: Conduits of industrial culture in the rural Midwest, 1922-1941

by

Denise Lorraine Dial

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

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This is to certify that the Doctoral dissertation of

Denise Lorraine Dial

has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program

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For the Graduate College

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The idea for this study of the organized corn husking contests originated in 1995 when Kevin Williams, director of the Grundy County Conservation Commission, and Robin England, a part-time museum coordinator for Grundy County, hired me as a summer intern to research the 1931 national corn husking contest, which had been held in Grundy County. My research was to provide the background information from which England planned to develop a display for the Grundy County Historical Museum and to create a depository of information for future research on the corn husking contests. The project was funded in part by a Iowa Historical Resources Development Grant. England and Williams had performed some preliminary research when I joined the project. I am grateful to Williams and England for introducing me to the corn husking contests and for providing me the opportunity to explore the contests as a possible dissertation project.

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ABSTRACT

The organized corn husking contests of the 1920s and 1930s facilitated the spread of scientific farming methods and contributed to farmers' increased reliance on scientists, technicians, and agribusiness suppliers. The efforts of agricultural leaders, bolstered by the enthusiastic boosterism of midwestern towns, made the corn husking contests annual composite snapshots of the growing industrialism in agriculture and rural life through this period of time. The associational relationships developed through participation in the corn husking contests encouraged rural residents to adopt the values, beliefs, methods, and technology of industrial culture.

The groups that organized and sponsored the corn husking contests and the rural people who participated in them are the main focus of this study: the midwestern farm journal editors, agricultural extension agents, agricultural college scientists and the staff of experiment stations, manufacturers of agricultural machines, members of Chambers of Commerce and other civic groups of small midwestern towns, and individual farmers. Corn culture was the glue that held these groups together. Each group had a unique interest in the corn husking contests and was able to realize this interest because of the diversity of activities involved in planning, preparing, advertising, and holding the contests. In spite of their individual motivations, these contest sponsors shared a common, industrialized, vision of Midwestern agriculture, a vision based on organizational association, efficient methods of production, and the application of modern science and technology.

INTRODUCTION

The organized corn husking contests of the 1920s and 1930s facilitated the spread of scientific farming methods and contributed to farmers' increased reliance on scientists, technicians, and agribusiness suppliers. The efforts of agricultural leaders, bolstered by the enthusiastic boosterism of midwestern towns, made the corn husking contests annual composite snapshots of the growing industrialism in agriculture and rural life through this period of time. The associational relationships developed through participation in the corn husking contests encouraged rural residents to adopt the values, beliefs, methods, and technology of industrial culture.[1]

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Farm journal sponsorship was essential to the development and sustainment of the corn husking contests. A core group of farm journals organized the contests between 1924 and 1926, and added new members through the 1930s. In 1924, the Nebraska Farmer and the Prairie Farmer joined Wallaces' Farmer in holding state and regional husking contests in Nebraska and Illinois. In 1925, the [Minnesota] Farmer began holding state

contests. In 1926, the Missouri Farmer joined the contest organization, the Farmer began sponsoring contests in South Dakota, the Prairie Farmer began holding contests in Indiana, and the journals formed a joint committee to organize and supervise national contests. In 1927, the Kansas Farmer joined the organized contests, and in 1931, the Ohio Farmer likewise began holding contests. In 1937, the Wisconsin Agriculturalist joined when Clifford Gregory became editor, and in 1938, the Capper paper the Pennsylvania Farmer joined the organized contests. The journals rotated the hosting of the national contest among themselves annually.

For eighteen years, from 1924 through 1941, these midwestern farm journals sponsored thousands of organized corn husking contests. In all, approximately five thousand county contests, one hundred fifty state contests, and twenty regional or national contests were held. Assuming that an average of ten huskers entered every county contest, at least fifty thousand midwestern men, and a few women, participated in the contests as huskers, and many thousands more participated by serving on one of the dozens of committees involved in conducting a husking contest. Thousands of people more not directly involved in putting on the contests came to watch them. Conceivably, millions of people listened to live radio broadcasts of the contests carried coast-to-coast by the National Broadcasting Company. Given the extent of the participation in the event, and that the participation expanded every year, it would be hard to deny that the corn husking contests were a significant part of midwestern rural life during the 1920s and 1930s.

From 1930 onward, the farm journals made a vigorous effort to involve local communities in the national contests. As town business groups assumed greater responsibility for arranging entertainment, food, and finding volunteer workers, the contests began to shake free of their original purpose, which had been to find out how much corn the fastest man could husk in a given period of time. Over time, the contests assumed an

entertainment dimension only tangentially linked to farm work and became vehicles through which the groups involved could reap individual reward.

Table 1 lists the location, the host community, and the approximate attendance of the Midwest and National contests.[2]

Table 1.--National and Midwest Corn Husking Contests, 1922-1941

Year	State	Host Community	Attendance
1922	Iowa	Wallace field, Polk County	11
1923	Iowa	Wallace field, Polk County	Unknown
1924	Iowa	Wallace field, Polk County	800
1925	Illinois	Burgess, Mercer County	4500
1926	Nebraska	Fremont, Dodge County	3000
1927	Minnesota	Winnebago, Faribault County	3000
1928	Indiana	Fowler, Benton County	18,000
1929	Missouri	Platte City, Platte County	10,000
1930	Kansas	Norton, Norton County	40,000
1931	Iowa	Grundy Center, Grundy County	35,000
1932	Illinois	Galva, Henry County	40,000
1933	Nebraska	West Point, Cuming County	70,000
1934	Minnesota	Fairmont, Martin County	60,000
1935	Indiana	Newton, Fountain County	110,000
1936	Ohio	Newark, Licking County	130,000
1937	Missouri	Marshall, Saline County	90,000
1938	South Dakota	Dell Rapids, Minnehaha County	100,000
1939	Kansas	Lawrence, Douglas County	100,000
1940	Iowa	Davenport, Scott County	125,000
1941	Illinois	Tonica, La Salle County	100,000

Historians have generally overlooked the corn husking contests and their significance for rural culture. Published analysis of the contests

has largely been left to those who participated or were personally influenced by the contests. In the few instances where the corn husking contests have received scholarly attention, most of those studies have been an investigation of a particular state's involvement. Recently, historian Gordon L. Iseminger argued that the corn husking contests in North Dakota were part of that state's quest for regional identity as part of the Corn Belt, in "North Dakota's Corn Husking Contests, 1939-1941." Leonard J. Jacobs, in "Kings of the Hill: Illini Huskers 1924-1941," studied the champion Illinois huskers. For Iowa, Reeves Hall preserved the origins of the corn husking contests in "First Iowa Husking Meets," and Herb Plambeck, former radio journalist, discusses his role in the Iowa contests in "This is Herb:" With Never a Dull Moment. In a departure from this trend, Richard S. Kirkendall, in "Corn Huskers and Master Farmers: Henry A. Wallace and the Merchandising of Iowa Agriculture," investigates Wallace's use of the corn husking contests to improve the quality of rural life through authentic rural recreation. The only comprehensive overview of the contests was published by Leonard J. Jacobs in Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards: Complete Digest of Corn Husking Records, which gives the facts related to the national corn husking contests.[3]

Studies of farmers' response to industrialism generally focus on farmers' political activities, ranging from radical resistance to conservative cooperation. A review of the literature reveals that few studies have been made of the way that a significant number of midwestern farmers, usually acting in groups, pursued progressive, industrialized agriculture through the 1920s and 1930s. Some historians see the Progressive-era and the Country Life Movement as most important for coming to terms with the growing industrialism of the Middle West. Others, like Shover, in First Majority -- Last Minority, and Mark Friedberger, in Farm Families and Change in Twentieth-Century America, argue that agriculture did not become fully industrialized until after World War II.[4]

Prominent among the works which focus on farmer's political activities during the Progressive era include James H. Shidler's Farm Crisis, 1919-1923, and John Hicks and Theodore Salutous's, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939. Hicks and Salutous argue that farmers' political activities were geared toward making farmers equals of industry in the marketplace. Farmers suffered defeats in obtaining this objective until the nature of the state changed and pluralism replaced party politics. Through producer and general farm associations, farmers found new political power at state and federal levels. The corn husking contests reflect this associational relationship between agriculture and the emerging agricultural industry.[5]

The premise that Progressivism was an adaptation to industrialism was formulated by historians such as Samuel P. Hays, Robert H. Wiebe, Ellis Hawley, and political scientists Martin Sklar and Steven Skowronek, who argue that Progressives accepted industrial culture as an accomplished fact, and set about trying to control, order, and improve it so that the American political tradition of democratic liberalism, which emphasized private property, individual initiative, and limited government, would be preserved. Hays and Wiebe both interpret the Progressive era in terms of the destruction of the isolated local community and its replacement with a single nation. While technology, such as telephones, radios, and automobiles helped increase the physical interaction between rural and urban residents, the associational relationships which developed through the corn husking contests helped extend the goals and values of industrial culture into the countryside.[6]

During the 1920s, bureaucratic arrangements supported industrialized agriculture and stimulated individual, community, and private effort. Historian Ellis Hawley argues that the central, unifying force of these years was the development, legitimization, and use of new managerial and bureaucratic institutions, led by organizational and technical experts, dedicated to solving problems and advancing the common good. The influence

of the new institutional arrangements seen by Hawley, and the leadership exhibited by the members of these institutions, can be clearly seen in the corn husking contests, especially in its structural arrangement, but also in the small town civic and business associations.[7]

David Thelen and Richard McCormick, in their studies of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, argue that the Progressive movement gave rise to a new democracy through interest group politics, or pluralism. Their approach de-emphasizes the influence of industrialism and focuses instead on political partisanship as the most important factor affecting the adoption of Progressive goals. McCormick finds that new avenues of political participation, such as access to administrative agencies through interest groups, replaced voting as the means of democratic action. In the farm sector, groups such as the American Farm Bureau Federation and the Farmers' Union gave an institutional voice to farmers' concerns and placed new demands on government.[8]

Associationalism developed out of the mobilization of industry in support of the United States entry into World War I. According to Ellis Hawley, the wartime experience led to "an enhanced vision of enlightened private orders enlisted in the national service and working with public agencies to advance the common good." Herbert Hoover was one of the leading proponents of the associational state through the use of cooperative institutions to form a type of "private government" that would balance the organizational requirements of industrialism with the liberal values protecting private property and ensuring limited government.[9]

Hawley argues that associationalism contributed to the passing of political power from unorganized individuals to new administrative experts who ran the government in what they believed was the public interest. While the corn husking contests support this theory of public power becoming concentrated in the hands of elites, they also demonstrate that the elites gained and held this power through the voluntary, mass participation of rural people. In associationalism, for the first time the

organizations that farmers' created for marketing their products were also viable structures for political action. The Grangers, the Alliance, and Populism had all started as marketing cooperatives, but found that they had no political influence in that form and thus transformed themselves into the political form most effective at the time: political parties. Unfortunately, in their new formation, the farmers' organizations found it necessary to make accommodations in order to gain a seat in power. Under associationalism, however, power became fragmented and cooperation was necessary on all sides.[10]

Farmers' resistance to the economic structure of industrialism during the Progressive era began to give out when they began forming producer associations and cooperatives as a way to negotiate for market influence. This study will demonstrate how the corn husking contests helped ease farmers into cooperative relationships with town businesses, county extension agents, agricultural colleges, and experiment stations by placing them together in a neutral space, away from market forces, where all participants shared the same common goal.

Until about a decade ago, agricultural historians who studied the 1920s and 1930s focused primarily on national politics and the economy. This focus has not been necessarily misplaced; studies of the farm depression of the 1920s, the congressional struggle over the McNary-Haugen bills, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Acts have helped students understand that during this period farmers increasingly turned to the federal government to help coordinate and regulate marketing and production. One example of a more recent study of national farm policy-making is David Hamilton's, From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy From Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928-1933, which identifies the tension between what Hamilton calls "counterorganization," or a form of nineteenth-century democratic agrarianism, and associationalism, which relied on non-public, structured forms in government, scientific methods, and organization to direct the farm

economy toward prosperity. Richard S. Kirkendall's Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt examines the impact that key persons at the national level had on agricultural policy. These studies tend to focus on the integration of industrial-oriented agricultural interest groups and their leaders into national farm policy-making, and ignore the interactions between individual farmers and associational groups at the local level. Iowa historian Joseph F. Wall investigated the local level, but he was more interested in events of resistance than of conciliation. Wall wrote, in "The Iowa Farmer in Crisis, 1920-1936," that the source of the farmers' distress was that he was both management and labor.[11]

Studies of farmers' social response to industrialism tend to focus on the Progressive Era and to argue that industrialism challenged the local centers of authority in rural society. Notable among these works are David R. Danbom who, in The Resisted Revolution, essentially argues that rural residents resisted the meddling of outside "experts" in their social institutions. Nevertheless, the reforms of school, church, and government consolidation suggested by the experts eventually were adopted by rural people. The activists in the Country Life Movement proposed both economic and social reforms for the countryside. Their suggestions for economic reforms focused on lowering farmers' production costs and encouraging farmers to adopt new marketing strategies. They encouraged the use of scientific farm management and mechanization to make farm work more efficient. They developed marketing strategies to replace competition with associational organization and cooperation among farm producers. Their social reforms focused on rural churches, schools, homes, and recreation. In this area, reformers sought to end rural isolation, increase satisfaction with rural life, and promote social and economic efficiency. In short, members of the Country Life Movement tried to reshape rural life into a more productive and rewarding industrialized form so that rural people would feel no need to move to cities.[12]

Although the Country Life Movement was virtually over by 1920, some of its ideas continued to find expression in rural life, in particular, the idea of creating authentic rural recreation, but also the idea of the domesticity of women, and the transformation of liberal democracy into government by elites. The corn husking contests continued many goals of Progressives, especially that of leadership by managers and experts and rural recreation. One of the unrealized goals of the Country Life Movement was that of developing authentic rural recreation to rival the recreation offered by industrial culture. Part of the desire for authentic rural recreation rested on the belief that newly emerging urban forms of recreation, such as watching moving pictures, joy-riding in automobiles, and frequenting nightclubs, appealed to the lowest instincts in human nature. Authentic rural recreation, according to its adherents in the Country Life Movement, encouraged the positive moral values of sobriety, productive use of time, and financial frugality. The corn husking contests, unlike the urban recreation forms, had a utilitarian purpose that served an entire region. The creators of the corn husking contests promoted them as authentic rural recreation in which no admission was ever charged and the event was wholesome and moral and encouraged rural people to act as a unit or through a community. In 1925, Henry A. Wallace wrote in Wallaces' Farmer, "We want a distinctive culture of our own in the country; we want to prevent our countryside being merely a field for the extension of town habits. . . .Not imitation of the town but the creation of a genuine rural civilization is what we need."[13]

Some historians who have written about the rural population's social response to industrialism during the 1920s see it as a struggle between traditional agrarian values and industrial culture. Don Kirschner, for example, wrote about the 1920s: "Ruralites had been trying for years to preserve the old values intact while they assimilated the fruits of the new technology. It was not an easy feat because technology was forcing them to graft the old values onto changing realities for which they were

ill-adapted." Historian Dorothy Schwieder has studied rural life during the 1920s, in "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Continuity." Schwieder finds that although rural people struggled between their belief in the "natural superiority of rural living" and the attractions of small-town and urban life, they "moved closer and closer to the lifestyle enjoyed by town and city dwellers."[14]

This study, in contrast to earlier studies, looks at farmers' social response to industrialism as exhibited through their participation in the corn husking contests and concludes that more midwestern farmers than previously believed responded favorably to industrialization and developed social relations with industrial entities through the most prominent political form of the time, pluralism. Political scientist Martin Sklar shows that rural America incorporated urban-made, industrial culture, its accompanying political relations, and its technology, such as radio, telephones, paved roads, automobile ownership, and motion pictures into everyday life in the 1920s.[15]

Politically, the contest structure reflected the pluralism of the 1920s, where many groups, seeking their own self-interest, proclaimed to be serving the public interest. Pluralism was built upon the foundation of associationalism. The public good identified by contest organizers was the increased agricultural production. While contest sponsors believed that they were serving the general welfare, they had defined that welfare to reflect their own interests. This group possessed control of and access to the structural institutions through which they projected their own interests as community interests, and found very little opposition in doing so. The associations of industrial culture promoted a vision of the common good that clearly favored modernization. The corn husking contests served this perception of common good by encouraging economic development, advancement of scientific knowledge, improvement of efficiency in farming, and dissemination of technological knowledge and tools. The corn husking contests were a public good, and any group that benefitted from the common

good was expected to contribute to the maintenance of that good. Contest promoters found support for their interests were shared by many progressive farmers and small-town businessmen.[16]

The number of studies dealing with the social response to industrial in the 1930s is sparse. Historian Mary Neth, in Preserving the Family Farm, comments on the dearth of rural history written about the 1920s and 1930s, by writing "much of the social history of rural America has focused on the growth of capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or after World War Two," so that very little deals with the period from 1900 to 1945. Neth's own work has made a much needed contribution to this neglected topic, shedding light on the degree to which industrial values and practices were incorporated into rural life at this time.[17]

Even farmers' actions during the New Deal era, when they organized county corn-hog committees, under the direction of county agents, to voluntarily reduce production have not attracted much interest from historians. One exception is D. Jerome Tweton's, The New Deal at the Grass Roots. Yet the corn husking contests, which were an act of direct participation in industrial culture, involved thousands more midwesterners over a longer sustained period of time than did events such as the Farmers' Holiday Movement and the Cow Wars. Farmers were much more actively involved in shaping their worlds than these incidents suggest, usually in sympathy with practices pushed by the extension service. Through on-farm corn-breeding, seed selection activities, farmers readily sought and adopted scientific developments and technology which promised to make them more efficient and productive. Corn Belt farmers readily formed Farm Bureaus and participated in programs sponsored by county agents. In the corn husking contests, farmers acted entirely within an associational structure created by the proponents of industrial agriculture.[18]

In midwestern counties, farmers and small-town businessmen developed public-interest bureaucracies similar to those of business. Hawley argues

that reformers wanted this expanding private bureaucracy to be perceived as operating in the public interest. In order to claim the connection with limited government, it was essential that private bureaucracy be free from state control. The new private bureaucracy was linked to government through a committee system and worked with government officials to formulate industrial codes and agreements, but it remained theoretically independent. In the private sector, the Chamber of Commerce an association of associations, served as a harmonizer and an informational clearing house, providing a mechanism through which associational cooperation could be mobilized and deployed.[19]

At the national and regional levels, associations were useful for directing activities too complicated to be controlled and steered at the individual or community level, but farmers and small-town dwellers continued to exert their influence over activities suited to local control. In the corn husking contests, the participation of farmers and community groups drove both the success of the contests and their ultimate demise. The contest structure grew and declined on the strength of local interest and participation, just as farmers' adoption of modern technology, scientific farming methods, and business practices were strongly influenced by the actions of individual farmers making individual decisions. No organization, bureaucracy, or institutionalized corporate sponsorship could sustain corn contests without the supporting actions of farmers seeking their own, individual, best economic interest. The farmers' multi-directional economic viewpoint kept them for identifying completely with any one organization. The corn husking contests, however, brought farmers together with the common cause of producing corn.

During the 1920s, industrialization continued in technological innovations, communication and transportation improvements, farm management practices, and the increasing dependence of farmers on farm supply companies, thus their integration into an agricultural industry. In post-World War I America, technology promised finally to transform the

substance of country living in a way never before possible. Improved roads, radio, telephone, automobiles, electrification of farm homes, and indoor plumbing were all bringing rural areas into a culture that had previously been foreign.[20]

Contests were important tools used to infuse industrial culture in the countryside. Contests of all kinds permeated rural and small-town life during this period. The culture of competition was ritualized into smaller, manageable, and rational contests that rewarded the use of modern, scientific methods with tangible prizes. Farmers had long participated in informal, unstructured contests that measured one farmer's performance against another's. In the early twentieth century, many of these contests were organized and given standardized rules in order to find the limits of production. State extension services, state colleges of agriculture, and state boards of agriculture, among other groups, used contests to ritualize the unorganized competition inherent in capitalism. The corn husking contests were part of a larger, production-oriented contest culture.

Contest culture helped spread science and technology in corn farming by awarding prizes to farmers who not only increased their production but who also kept detailed records of their methods so that others could follow their procedure and obtain similar results. Two contests, in particular, are relevant to the corn husking contests: the corn shows and the corn yield contests. Although the place of these contests within the context of a larger contest culture has not been fully explored, scholars have examined how they contributed to the development of hybrid seed corn. Historian Deborah Fitzgerald, in The Business of Breeding, and historian Jack Ralph Kloppenburg Jr., in First the Seed, argue that the corn shows and corn yield contests influenced the development of hybrid corn and the rise of private seed corn companies. Earlier studies tying these two contests to the development of to hybrid corn include Henry A. Wallace and Earl N. Bressman, Corn and Its Early Father, Martin A. Mosher, Early Iowa

Corn Yield Tests and Related Later Programs, Earl Ross, Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey, Richard A. Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers: Prophets of Plenty, and G. F. Sprague and J. C. Cunningham, "Growing the Bumper Corn Crop."[21]

Although the corn husking contests originated in contest culture, by the mid-1930s they had become more like agricultural fairs than contests. The corn husking contests united the contest culture of production agriculture with a culture of fairs, town celebrations, and harvest festivals. Warren J. Gates, in "Modernization as a Function of an Agricultural Fair," shows that midwestern fairs had often been used to encourage progressive farming. Fred Kiffen and Earle Ross also contribute to the understanding of the agricultural fair.[22]

The role of the extension service in rural life has also been closely examined for the period of the first two decades of the twentieth century, but the period from 1920 to 1940 remains relatively unmined. During World War I, the extension service and agricultural colleges encouraged farmers to increase production, and the Department of Agriculture had made raising productivity one of its key goals. Falling farm profits in the early 1920s led to debates over whether it was better to continue increasing farm output or to make production methods more efficient.

Henry A. Wallace espoused the aspects of Progressive philosophy, including that of bringing order and efficiency to agricultural and rural life. Wallace, however, was not so much a supporter of marketing strategies, whether cooperative or government-supported, as he was of making farming more efficient and thus reducing the costs of production. Wallace's policies tended to emphasize farmers' control over their products, and that by controlling production, they could directly influence the market price. Wallace's policies favored using the government to provide an overall management of the nation's agriculture while giving farmers the information, technology, and economic security to make their own farming decisions. Wallace believed that farmers should

listen to scientists and consider their advice in order to rise farm profits, but individual farmers should adopt the advice only if it proved practical for their operations.[23]

In 1922, Henry A. Wallace, the same year that he started the corn husking contests, succeeded his father as editor of Wallaces' Farmer. As editor, Wallace promoted both the economic and the social reform goals of the Country Life Movement. Wallace encouraged efficiency, mechanization, and organization in farming, and competition in the form of contests. Ever practical, Wallace intended his contests to influence the economic aspects of rural life by making manual husking more efficient and thus less expensive in terms of hours of labor. Kloppenburg points out that Henry A. Wallace "understood perhaps better than any American of his generation, the process by which agricultural production was being integrated into modern industrial capitalism." Wallace hoped to shape and guide that integration so that what he saw as the positive aspects of farm life, intelligent, sober, rational, and productive, would help soften some of the impersonal aspects of commercial agriculture. Wallace really was a champion for both the old and the new and wanted to combine them in such a way that a class of economically secure farm families, healthy in both mind and body, would remain on the land as efficient producers.[24]

Many such as Wallace saw efficiency as a tool for lowering farmers' production costs as a way to increase production. Economic depression came to agriculture during the early 1920s, and overproduction was identified as the immediate cause. Wallace believed that total output had to be controlled and he tried to convince farmers to voluntarily reduce their corn production. Clifford Gregory conducted a similar campaign in the Prairie Farmer. Many farmers agreed with the editors that less production would bring higher prices, but as independent producers, no market mechanism encouraged individual production control until the New Deal cast the federal government in that role. Farmers also wanted higher prices and lower production costs. They could not control prices, but they could

control their production costs in some areas and thus remain profitable even when prices declined. Agricultural economists and most farmers believed that the wages paid for manual corn husking could be reduced if husking could be made more efficient.[25]

Wallace possessed a deep and abiding faith in the resourcefulness and inventiveness of individual farmers, and he wanted to encourage those characteristics. Wallace wanted farmers to find their own solutions to problems, not merely take the solutions offered to them by experts. Wallace believed that contests would encourage farmers' ingenuity, so he invented both Iowa Corn Yield Contest and the corn husking contest. He believed that science was not the only fountain for truth, but that practical experience also played an important role. In the corn husking contests, Wallace sought the man who, through experience and practice, had developed the best way to husk corn. Although it would have been possible for Wallace to consult time-and-motion experts to discover the most effective way for the human body to harvest corn, Wallace instead provided incentives for farmers to discover this for themselves. Further, Wallace came to appreciate the different husking methods required for different types of corn and in different weather and field conditions. Perhaps this was the most important knowledge gained from the corn husking contests, that corn had to remain uniform under a wide variety of conditions for efficient picking, either by man or by machine.

Social interactions between town and farm people during the 1920s and 1930s has received little attention from historians. Most historians tend to focus on one group or the other, such as in studies of urban life in the Lynd's Middletown, and in Tom Morain's Prairie Grassroots. Urban associations and their role in town boosterism have generally been overlooked. One recently study, however, Jeffery A. Charles' Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions brings fresh air to the subject. Other than Charles, historians have tended to study nineteenth-

century boosterism and its contribution to town building, but have generally ignored twentieth-century boosterism.[26]

The gap between town and country life, however, was narrowing considerably during this period. In the early twentieth century, for example, chautauquas, high schools, town churches, businesses, commercial clubs, and the extension service, had brought town and country together. Small towns played an important role in offering recreational activities for farm families. Small town merchants had an ulterior motive of wanting to attract customers to stores to increase sales, but nevertheless, they sponsored activities well before 1920. The corn husking contests provided an opportunity to extend the influence of town groups and organizations into the countryside and to publicize the modernization of the countryside to the rest of America.

The corn husking contests reflected the influence of industrialization on midwestern gender roles. The corn husking contests were clearly male-dominated events. In some states, the huskers were exclusively male. Henry A. Wallace and the other farm journal sponsors viewed the contests as tests of masculinity and areas of male activity. Men promoted and sponsored contests. They worked on committees to organize and judge them. The men worked through business hierarchies and community groups that had a primarily male membership. The role of women in the corn husking contests mirrored their activities within the family, community, and in the fields. As the contests continued, women's participation became increasingly shaped by contest organizers, especially farm journal editors and small town booster organizations, to reflect Progressive attitudes about the proper role for women in industrial society.[27]

Farmers readily adopted new technologies, especially ones that provided immediate solutions to discrete problems, once they were shown an innovation's economic superiority over existing methods. A farmer almost could not help but adopt the new technology because, as historian Clarence Danhof points out, change was traditional to the American farmer. The

culture of Midwestern corn farming was a culture of change and competition; agricultural contests, such as the corn husking contests added cooperation. This culture was fostered by the belief that acceptance of change and participation in the process of change would make a farmer more competitive and increase the chances of economic reward. The culture associated with midwestern corn farming rested on the belief that change in general, and change in work technology specifically, brought economic prosperity.[28]

Scholars of agricultural technology point to the adoption of tractors equipped with power take-offs, mechanical corn pickers, and hybrid corn as the foundation for an industrial transformation occurring in corn culture from 1920 to 1940. These studies have been largely economic, weighing the costs to farmers, both opportunity and real, for changing their corn growing methods and techniques. These scholars have generally concluded that farmers sought their economic advantage first, readily foregoing accepted practices if another method, particularly if it saved labor, was available. Technological innovation in corn harvesting, especially the mechanical picker, the double tractor hitch, and the corn holding tank disrupted group husking arrangements by making it possible for a farmer to husk corn by himself at a rapid rate.[29]

Several counties throughout the Midwest receive special attention in this study because of their long-standing involvement in the corn husking contests. The type of corn culture practiced in these counties helps account for their commitment to the husking contests. Counties in the cash grain and cattle-feeding areas of the Midwest were the first to get involved in the corn husking contest. These counties held the majority of national champions, hosted contests where husking records were set, were some of the most mechanized in 1941, and were among the first counties to start phasing out the contests when hand husking was abandoned in favor of machine husking. In Illinois, Henry, Woodford, and Piatt counties were heavily involved in the contests both by being home to champion huskers

and by hosting county, state, and national contests. The farmers in these counties were routinely in the forefront in participation in corn yield contests and corn variety tests sponsored by the state extension service and private corn breeders, such as Lester Pfister and George Krug in Woodford County. Four state champions came from Henry County, three from Woodford County, and two from Piatt County. Illinois huskers from cash grain and livestock-feeding areas won the national contest seven times, more than any other state.[30]

In Iowa, Grundy County receives special attention, in part because this work began as a study of the 1931 national corn husking contest held in Grundy County, but also because Grundy County residents demonstrated the fullest involvement in the corn husking contests of any Iowa county. Grundy huskers participated in the corn husking contests longer than any other Midwestern county, beginning in 1922 and continuing until the final contests in 1941. The editor of the Grundy Register, J. J. Vanderwicken, closely followed the contests, writing more stories consistently through the two decade period than any other newspaper consulted for this study. The paper covered the contests, the contestants, the condition of the corn crop, the activities of the county agent, and the impact of federal New Deal programs on Grundy agriculture, and the conditions of rural life.

The majority of the original research for this study was performed by reading the sponsoring farm journal's accounts of the corn husking contests. This may have led to some distortion of the positive impact of the contests because the farm journal editors wrote unfailing enthusiastic articles about the contests, devoting extensive page space, and journal resources, to promote the contests. Farm journal accounts were complimented by accounts in newspapers published in towns where state and national corn husking contests were held. Again, the booster mentality of the local press undoubtedly cast the contests in a positive light, but occasionally, a local editor included a discussion of some of the problems faced by local organizers having to coordinate many details and control a

huge crowd of visitors during the contests. The Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Agricultural Agents also proved helpful for seeing the corn husking contests as a major component of a county agent's annual work. The Census of Agriculture for 1930 and 1940 contributed to the understanding of the rate of mechanization.

Over time, the contests became less like actual farm work and more of an representative example, a ritualized activity, of an ideal of modern farming. This transformation occurred at national and state contests more than at county contests. In spite of being highly structured, more precisely demarcated, and set aside in time and space from ordinary life, the corn husking contests nevertheless filled an utilitarian purpose: they encouraged fast and efficient husking. Farmers supported the contests because they seemed to serve a practical purpose. Local county contests remained closer to actual farming practices, although they did make adjustments for the sake of holding the contest, such as dividing a corn field into husking lands for each contestant. The smaller crowds at the county contests, together with less entertainment, promotion, media, and equipment displays, made the county contests a project for local farmers. County contests provided a solid foundation of actual farm work for the contest hierarchy but ironically also served as their undoing when farmers turned from hand husking to machine husking.

The corn husking contests, at their fullest expression, combined existing town and community rituals with modern technology and organizational structures. Rural residents perceived this building of the future upon the past. In 1928, Payne Mercer, a field reporter for the Prairie Farmer, wrote about the feeling in the air at the national corn husking contest, "All day we feel this change, a forward march of progress, uniting the ever-growing bond of age-old customs with the new, through the hearts, minds, and souls of our people."[31]

The corn husking contests reduced complex processes and relationships to a representative ritual among institutions, individuals, private

organizations, and government. The associational structure of the corn husking contests continued into the New Deal era even though the associative state was discredited by the economic depression of the late 1920s. By the end of the 1930s, the corn husking contests had lost their ability to claim that they served a public good. For one thing, hand husking was essentially a thing of the past, especially among the most progressive corn farmers in the central Corn Belt. While farmers no longer drew a positive benefit from the contests, other groups did, sometimes at farmers' expense. Towns, especially the larger ones who hosted the national contests in the late-1930s, benefitted from the trade and publicity surrounding the contests. Equipment manufacturers no doubt benefitted from the opportunity to display and demonstrate their equipment. Each supporting group derived some benefit, but the common purpose of making agriculture more efficient, and thereby more profitable, had been achieved.

Notes

1. The characteristics of industrial culture given here are derived from Robert Wiebe's components of modernization: mechanization of production and distribution, impersonal social relations, large bureaucratic organization and centralized power, development of mass communication and increasing uniformity of attitudes, secularization of popular thought, greater discipline to the clock and calendar, and a rising faith in a scientific solution to human problems, see Robert H. Wiebe, "The Progressive Years, 1900-1917," in Reinterpretation of American History and Culture, ed. William H. Cartwright and Richard L. Watson, Jr. (Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1973). Samuel P. Hays, in The Response to Industrialism: 1885-1914, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), argues that technology, in the form of markets, machinery, and science, contributed to the commercialization of agriculture and its integration into a "complex industrial system" during

the late-nineteenth century (15). Further, Hays argues that farmers found organization a necessary requirement for their economic survival (48).

2. The 1922 contest was the first organized corn husking contest held in the Midwest. Henry A. Wallace invited six Iowa huskers to participate in the contest, but only three showed up on the appointed day. The 1923 Midwest contest was co-sponsored by Wallaces' Farmer and the Clark Manufacturing Company of Chicago, manufacturer of husking hooks. In this three-hour contest, the champion husker from Iowa met a husker selected by the Clark Company. No record of attendance remains. The 1924 Midwest contest was the last one sponsored and conducted entirely by Wallaces' Farmer. All three early contests were held in a field owned by Henry A. Wallace and did not have co-sponsorship from town groups or county agents.

The attendance figures for the national contests are approximations and have been derived by averaging the estimated attendance reported in the various farm journals. For example, attendance at the 1937 national contest near Marshall, Missouri was estimated to be 75,000 by the Prairie Farmer, 75,000 to 100,000 by the Ohio Farmer, 100,000 by the Kansas City Star, and 125,000 by the Missouri Ruralist. Observers arrived at their attendance estimates mainly by counting the number of cars parked in neat rows in nearby farm fields. Often, the hosting farm journal counted more cars than anyone else.

3. Gordon L. Iseminger, "North Dakota's Corn Husking Contests, 1939-1941," Agricultural History 71, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 19-45; Leonard J. Jacobs, "Kings of the Hill: Illini Huskers 1924-1941," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 76, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 205-12; Reeves Hall, "First Iowa Husking Meets," Palimpsest 24 no. 11 (November 1943): 333-47; Herb Plambeck, "This is Herb:" With Never a Dull Moment, 4th ed., rev. (Ames, Iowa: Sigler Printing and Publishing, 1994), 51-57; Richard S. Kirkendall, "Corn Huskers and Master Farmers: Henry A. Wallace and the Merchandising of Iowa Agriculture," Palimpsest 65, no. 3 (May/June 1984): 82-93; Leonard J. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards: Complete

Digest of Corn Husking Records (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1975).

4. John L. Shover, First Majority--Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976); Mark Friedberger, Farm Families and Change in Twentieth-Century America (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

5. James H. Shidler, Farm Crisis, 1919-1923, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); John D. Hicks and Theodore Saloutos, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951). For an analysis of the emergence of a new associational state during the Progressive Era, see Steven Skowronek, Building a New American State: the Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Mary Summers points out, in "Putting Populism Back In: Rethinking Agricultural Politics and Policy," Agricultural History 70, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 395-414, that the major farmers' movements that followed the Civil War, including the Populists, "fought for economic and political power to ensure that farm families benefitted as much from the great changes of the new age as industrialists and entrepreneurs (401-02)." Farmer participation in the corn husking contests follows in this tradition of middle-class farmers seeking a place within industrial culture.

6. Samuel P. Hays, "The New Organizational Society," in Building the Organizational Society: Essays on Associational Activities in Modern America, ed. Jerry Israel (New York: The Free Press, 1972); Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Robert H. Wiebe, "The Progressive Years 1900-1917;" Ellis Hawley, The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order, A History of the American People and Their Institutions 1917-1933 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979); Martin Sklar, The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics (New York: Cambridge

University Press, 1988); Skowronek, Building a New American State. Hawley, in The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order, argues that by 1920 Americans had created "an interdependent community in which each was concerned with the interests of all" that still retained the essence of traditional liberalism: private property, individual initiative, and delimited government (80).

7. Ellis W. Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921-1928," Journal of American History 61, no. 1 (June 1974): 116-40; Hawley, The Search for a Modern Order, xv.

8. Richard L. McCormick, Public Life in Industrial America, 1877-1917 (Long Beach, Calif.: American Historical Association, 1990); David Thelen, Paths of Resistance: Tradition and Dignity in Industrializing Missouri (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

9. Hawley, The Search for a Modern Order, v; Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,'" 117.

10. Samuel P. Hays, in The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), makes the point that both Granger and Populists cooperative efforts gave way to partisan politics (30). In the first decades of the twentieth century, Hays writes, "Commodity organizations became the source of strength for the new farm politics that stressed non-partisan, 'pressure-group' activity rather than third parties (62)."

11. David Hamilton, From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy From Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928-1933 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Richard S. Kirkendall, Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986); Joseph F. Wall, "The Iowa Farmer in Crisis, 1920-1936," Annals of Iowa 47, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 115-27.

12. David R. Danbom, The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the

Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979), 61-62.

13. Wallaces' Farmer, 1 May 1925, quoted in Dorothy Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Community," Annals of Iowa 47, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 104-15.

14. Don S. Kirschner, City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920s (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1970), 251; Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s," 112, 115.

15. Sklar, The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 4.

16. Richard McCormick, "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," American Historical Review 86, no. 2 (April 1981): 248. For further reading on how associations defined the general welfare in terms of their own best interests, see John D. Buenker, "The Progressive Era: A Search for Synthesis," Mid-America 51 (1969): 175-93; David P. Thelen, "Social Tensions and the Origins of Progressivism," Journal of American History 56 (1969): 323-41; Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" American Quarterly 22 (1970): 20-34.

17. For further reading on the social history of rural America before 1900 and after World War II, see Mary Neth, Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940 (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 329-30.

18. D. Jerome Tweton, The New Deal at the Grass Roots: Programs for the People in Otter Tail County, Minnesota (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988).

19. Hawley, The Search for a Modern Order, 90-92.

20. James H. Shideler, "Flappers and Philosophers, and Farmers: Rural-Urban Tensions of the Twenties," Agricultural History 47, no. 4 (October 1973): 283-99; Mary Neth, "Leisure and Generational Change: Farm Youths in the Midwest, 1910-1940," Agricultural History 67, no. 2 (Spring 1993):

163-84; Reynold M. Wik, "The Radio in Rural America," Agricultural History, 55, no. 4 (October 1981): 339-350; Michael L. Berger, The Devil Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929 (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1979); Joseph Interrante, "You Can't Go to Town in a Bathtub: Automobile Movement and the Reorganization of Rural American Space, 1900-1930," Radical History Review 21 (Fall 1979): 151-68.

21. Deborah Fitzgerald, The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890-1940 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); Jack Ralph Kloppenburg Jr., First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Henry A. Wallace and Earl N. Bressman, Corn and Its Early Fathers, rev. ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988); Martin A. Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests and Related Later Programs (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1962); Earle Ross, Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey (Ames: Iowa State University, 1951); Richard A. Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers: Prophets of Plenty (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1947); G. F. Sprague and J. C. Cunningham, "Growing the Bumper Corn Crop," in A Century of Farming in Iowa 1846-1946, Members of the Staff of the Iowa State College and the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station (Ames: Iowa State College, 1946), 32-45.

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23. Richard S. Kirkendall, "Henry A. Wallace's Turn Toward the New

Deal, 1921-1924," Annals of Iowa 49, no. 3, 4 (Winter/Spring 1988): 138-53.

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25. Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, Henry A. Wallace of Iowa: The Agrarian Years, 1910-1940 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968), 50, 68, 86; Wallaces' Farmer, 7 December 1923, 7.

26. Thomas Morain, Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988); Jeffery A. Charles, Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). See Daniel Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York: Random House, 1965) and Lewis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), for examples of studies of nineteenth-century boosterism.

27. For discussions of the role of women in farm work, see Deborah Fink, Agrarian Women: Wives and Mother in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1992); Deborah Fitzgerald, "Farmers Deskilled: Hybrid Corn and Farmers' Work," Technology and Culture 34, no. 2 (April 1993): 324-43; Katherine Jellison, Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963 (University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Katherine Jellison, "Women and Technology on the Great Plains, 1910-40," Great Plains Quarterly 8 (Summer 1988): 145-57; Joan M. Jensen, With These Hands: Women Working on the Land (Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, 1981); Katherine Jensen, "Mother Calls Herself a Housewife, But She Buys Bulls," in The Technological Woman: Interfacing with Tomorrow, ed. Jan Zimmerman (New York: Prager, 1983), 136-44; Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System: Defining Work in

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29. Allan Bogue, in "Changes in Mechanical and Plant Technology: The Corn Belt, 1910-1940," Journal of Economic History 43 no. 1 (March 1983): 1-25, identifies the main three technological innovations. J. Sanford Rikoon, Threshing in the Midwest, 1820-1940: A Study of Traditional Culture and Technological Change (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) examines the impact of technological change in small grain threshing on social relationships in neighborhood work circles, finding that the more progressive that a farm was in terms of the use of science and technology, the greater the likelihood that the farm was connected to networks beyond the local neighborhood, more so than other, less-progressive farmers.

30. Jacobs, Battle of the Bangboards, 203; Galva News, 19 September 1940.

31. Payne Mercer, "A Husking Bee Up-to-Date," Prairie Farmer, 24 November 1928, 17.

CONTEST CULTURE IN CORN FARMING

The corn husking contests existed as part of a larger contest culture which encouraged farmers to improve their farming methods and increase production. Agricultural contests, at the beginning of the twentieth century, were sponsored, promoted, and conducted primarily by agricultural associations, farm journals and producers groups. During the late-1910s, the extension service joined the contest culture through the work of county agricultural agents in corn shows, corn yield contests, corn husking contests, and other types of contests. Agricultural contests played an integral role in the rural Midwest's absorption of industrial culture by giving farmers the opportunity to experiment with emerging innovations and to evaluate their discoveries in an artificial space isolated from market considerations and other outside influences.[1]

Twentieth-century agricultural contests helped foster a working relationship between corn growers, experiment station scientists, agricultural college staff, farm journal editors, county extension agents, and producer associations. The farmers who participated in these contests learned how to conduct scientific investigations of their farming practices, how to record their observations, and how to apply the knowledge gained from their investigations to farming practices. While these contests clearly influenced midwestern farming, they attracted little attention beyond a relatively small group of farmers and scientists. The corn husking contests changed that by infusing agricultural contests with a recreational flavor.

In the Midwest, contests were especially important for developing high-yielding breeds of corn. In 1923, Henry A. Wallace commented on the role of corn contests when he wrote, "Contests! Continually contests! Really it seems that every acre of corn now grown in the corn belt traces back to corn which has been thru a contest." Wallace was hardly exaggerating. Two types of contests in particular had a major impact on midwestern corn growing: the corn show and the corn yield contest, both of

which were designed to help farmers identify the best seed for producing high-yields. The corn shows encouraged farmers to select seed corn based on its physical characteristics, such as ear length, cob width, and roughness of kernel. The yield contests, conversely, taught farmers that physical characteristics were not necessarily a reliable indicator of yield potential.[2]

Corn shows existed decades before being formally organized by state experiment stations. During the nineteenth century, corn shows were typically local affairs, held in conjunction with fairs, town celebrations, and other social gatherings, and were usually judged by a local person with a reputation for possessing good farming knowledge. The winners received some type of prize, often ribbons and cash. Winning a corn show became a profitable side line for some farmers because it resulted in handsome cash prizes, and also because it encouraged them to go into the corn breeding business. After winning a corn show, seed varieties gained popularity and were widely distributed, such as Leaming corn after winning at the Paris World's Fair in 1878 and Reid's Yellow Dent after winning at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Reid's Yellow Dent became popular among farmers because it possessed the rare combination of proper corn show appearance and good field performance. Reid's Yellow Dent spread through the Midwest through corn shows and contests. In Iowa, Reid's Yellow Dent was introduced through a Wallaces' Farmer Boys' Corn Contest in 1902 and 1903, as well as through the corn shows organized by Perry Holden, Iowa State College professor, and the Iowa Corn and Small Grain Growers Association. Holden encouraged every Farmers' Institute, college short course, high school, county fair, and the State Fair in Iowa to hold a corn show.[3]

During the first decade of the twentieth century, midwestern state experiment stations formalized the corn shows by establishing standardized rules, a score card, judging procedures, and statewide contests. The first statewide corn show in Iowa, organized by the Iowa Corn and Small Grain

Growers' Association, was held in Ames in 1904. State experiment stations published guidelines for evaluating the corn, as in Holden's "Selecting and Preparing Seed Corn," which awarded points to a sample of ear corn based on the trueness to breed characteristics determined by the shape, length, and circumference of the ear, the furrows between the rows, and the proportion of corn to cob. In Illinois, the Illinois Crop Improvement Association helped develop the criteria for judging the corn shows. The experienced corn farmers and extension service scientists who devised the corn show scorecards did so on the assumption that they knew instinctively what good seed corn looked like. The early Iowa corn shows rewarded ears of corn which had uniformity of shape and size with extremely rough, deeply-dented kernels.[4]

Rural sociologist Jack Kloppenberg Jr. writes that the corn shows actually encouraged a debilitating genetic uniformity in corn through the inbreeding of invisible, yield-depressing traits, which consequently reduced vigor. As many farmers selected their seed corn for the same physical characteristics exhibited by the deeply-dented "pretty-ear" show corn, they unwittingly produced a lower-yielding seed corn. Almost two decades passed before corn farmers accepted the idea that genetic make-up determined good seed corn, and that genetic qualities were not always evident in outward appearance. Thus, the corn shows had the opposite of their intended effect.[5]

In 1904, while the organized corn shows were gaining popularity among farmers and scientists, a teen-aged Henry A. Wallace conducted experiments which showed the fallacy of judging the vigor of seed corn by its outward appearance. Perry Holden had given young Wallace some seed from a corn show winner, which Wallace planted in a small plot in Des Moines, Iowa, planting the seed from each ear in a separate row so that he could accurately compare the results. Wallace found that the ear which had placed first in the show yielded among the poorest in the field. Holden then put Martin L. Mosher, an Iowa State College student, to work with

agronomy professor L. C. Burnett to plant winning seed from the corn shows on the Story County Poor Farm in order to further test Wallace's findings. When Wallace entered Iowa State in 1906, Mosher showed him the experiments, which had the same results as Wallace's own. After Mosher left Iowa State College in 1912, agronomy professor Harold D. Hughes continued the corn yield experiments.[6]

When Mosher left Iowa State, he carried the idea of a corn yield contest with him. In 1913, Mosher was hired as the agricultural extension agent in Clinton County, Iowa, where he conducted the first organized county corn yield contest in the manner that he had conducted yield tests for Holden. Over one hundred county farmers participated to find the best strain of corn for that county. In 1916, Mosher was hired by farmers in Woodford County, Illinois, to organize a similar, three-year corn yield contest for them. Corn that performed well in these early county yield contests, such as Studeman in Clinton County and Krug in Woodford County, soon became widely planted across the Midwest and challenged the dominance of Reid's Yellow Dent.[7]

During the 1910s, a few corn breeders in Iowa and Illinois began to question the value of the corn shows. Eugene Funk, who grew score card perfect corn for several years, began to notice that his yields were declining. Henry A. Wallace, who kept up with both Mosher's and Hughes' yield tests, was convinced that the corn show standards followed by farmers were hurting corn growing. Wallace viewed the corn shows as social occasions, but not as scientific experiments, and he thought it unfortunate that farmers thought the corn shows had practical advantages. Nevertheless, he realized the persuasive power of contests so that he did not merely criticize the corn shows, but offered a new kind of contest to replace it. In 1919, Wallace wrote in Wallaces' Farmer, "If it is impossible to tell much about the yield of corn by looking at it, why shouldn't the corn show branch out into a contest of a new kind . . . a yield test under controlled conditions. The yield contests would give

farmers the opportunity to actually see the vigor of seed only suggested by the corn shows."[8]

In Iowa, Wallace and Harold D. Hughes organized the first statewide corn yield test in 1920, in cooperation with the Iowa Corn and Small Grain Growers' Association, which also continued its sponsorship of the corn shows. The association enjoyed a close cooperative relationship with Iowa State College through Joe L. Robinson, secretary of the association and a farm crops staff member at the Experiment station. In 1922, when Frederick D. Richey became the principal agronomist in charge of corn investigations for the USDA's Office of Cereal Crops and Disease, he designated federal funds for the corn yield contests. In 1922, Iowa State College hired A. A. Bryan, who was an expert in statistical methods, to establish standards for the corn yield contests. The corn yield tests retained some of the more popular elements of the corn shows by encouraging competition among the farmers and offering rewards such as trophies, ribbons, cash, and recognition for superior performance. For the first few years, the yield tests were combined with the corn shows, which helped farmers make the transition from one type of evaluation to another. In Illinois, a Utility score card was developed for the corn shows by Eugene Funk and the Illinois Corn Improvement Association that rewarded vigor, disease resistance, and germination rate more than uniformity. In Iowa, the results of the statewide corn yield tests were announced at the corn shows. By 1921, the yield tests were overshadowing the corn shows, and in 1924, Wallace was able to write that thousands of farmers had discarded low-yielding strains of Reid's Yellow Dent in favor of strains which had proved themselves to be of high-yielding power through the state corn yield contest.[9]

By 1930, corn growing states had established two types of yield contests, statewide and local. In both cases, the goal was to identify particular varieties for individual sections of the state which would produce the largest yields of sound grain under local conditions. In 1924,

for the Iowa statewide contests, the Iowa Corn Growers' Association divided the state into four sections, and each section was further divided into three districts, for a total of twelve districts state-wide. Farmers wanting to enter their corn in the yield test were instructed to send twelve pounds of their most promising seed corn, along with ten dollars, to Secretary Robinson. The entry fee was reduced to three dollars for Iowa residents in 1925. When received, the corn was classed according to the geographic section from which it originated, and during the following spring was planted in a test field located in that district; cultivation methods and growing conditions were kept uniform for each variety.[10]

Farmers who dabbled in breeding, and commercial breeders as well, were encouraged to enter their corn in the yield tests. In 1923, the first hybrids were entered in the Iowa statewide yield test, and they consistently yielded as much, sometimes more, than open-pollinated varieties. In 1924, four hybrids were entered in the Iowa tests, one of which was Henry A. Wallace's Copper Cross, which won a gold medal. Wallace, a private breeder, obtained his breeding stock from public institutions, as did most of the early breeders. In the 1920s, corn germ plasm was considered public property and as such moved freely between public and private breeders. One of Wallace's inbred lines came from the Leaming corn that had been developed by Donald F. Jones at the Connecticut Experiment Station, and the other came from Frederick D. Richey, at that time an assistant in corn investigations at the USDA. Wallace produced enough seed from the cross to offer it for sale to farmers. Rural sociologist Jack Kloppenberg Jr. points out that this was not the last time that publicly developed lines would bring private profit. In 1926, the Iowa contest created a separate class for hybrids, and in 1927, two hundred six hybrids were entered; a few years later the open-pollinated class was discontinued as all the entries were hybrids.[11]

In part, the dominance by hybrids in the yield tests can be attributed to the Purnell Act of 1925, which provided federal funds for a national

corn breeding program for hybrid corn. As implemented by Frederick Richey, the act placed corn belt experiment station research on a cooperative basis. Annual meetings between experiment station personnel created an opportunity for the systematic exchange of ideas, and incidently, of corn breeding material. With the Purnell Act, a new sense of shared purpose regarding hybrid corn developed between the USDA, state experiment stations, and private breeders.[12]

County yield tests, on the other hand, were conducted and financed primarily by participating farmer and local groups; however, the tests did receive federal funds indirectly through the work of extension agents. Many county yield tests continued their connection with a county corn show, often being held at the same time. The county yield contests were entities unto themselves, and the winner of a county contest did not advance to a state contest. In this way, the county contests were held to answer specific questions about local corn production and were supported financially by local groups and farmers, not directly with federal money. Area farmers and private small-scale breeders provided the seed. The goal of the contest was simply to see which seed variety produced the highest yield. In the mid-1920s, Illinois county extension agents began organizing these local yield contests, following Mosher's example in Woodford County. In 1924, for example, Fulton County agent J. N. Price organized a Five-Acre Corn Growing Contest, which twenty-one farmers entered. Prizes were awarded at the annual corn show in December. The same year, McLean County agent Harrison Fahronkopf organized both the Acre Corn Club Contest and the fourth annual county Utility Corn Show. In 1928, in Minnehaha County, South Dakota, forty-four farmers entered the Ten-Acre Corn Contest jointly sponsored by the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce, International Harvester Company, John Deere Plow Company, Rock Island Plow Company, and Dakota Iron Store. A corn show was planned in conjunction with the contest.[13]

These early county yield contests were designed to compare locally grown, open-pollinated varieties, but by 1930, state Experiment stations

were encouraging counties to hold so-called variety tests. Essentially, the variety test was a yield test, but it compared commercial varieties, usually hybrids, adapted to a particular area by breeders. Sometimes breeders provided the seed free of charge, other times, farmers had to purchase the seed. Some corn variety tests held during the early 1930s included both hybrids and open-pollinated varieties. In Jackson County, Kansas, the 1932 variety test included four hybrids and four open-pollinated varieties: Reid's Yellow Dent, Harmon White, Pride of Saline, and Boone County White. The highest yielding variety was Hybrid No. 2090, which netted seventy-three bushels per acre. The open-pollinated Harmon White came in a close second with seventy-two and a half bushels per acre. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, farmers in Linn County, Missouri, participated in annual corn variety tests which were open to commercial seed companies, who typically entered hybrids, as well as private farmers, who usually entered open-pollinated varieties. The corn test plots were located on the private farms of individual farmers who volunteered to make field space available for a comparative study. By growing different varieties in one field, the amount of rainfall, soil type, soil preparation, planting and cultivating practices were assumed to be the same for all the corn so that the only remaining variable was the corn itself. The Missouri State Corn Growers Association cooperated with the agricultural extension service to conduct the Linn County tests.[14]

Many counties organized both regular yield tests and variety yield tests thus ensuring that non-commercially bred corn, which had been adapted to the area by local breeders, was evaluated as thoroughly as commercially bred seed corn. During the 1930s, Grundy County, Iowa, farmers conducted both a Ten-Acre Yield Contest and a Variety Test practically every year. In the variety test, Pioneer, Funk's, and other commercial breeders sent samples of their best-adapted seed to the Grundy County Farm Bureau for planting in designated fields. In the 1934 Variety Test conducted in Black Hawk County, Iowa, seed samples from Northrup

King, Pioneer 323, Krug open-pollinated, and Reid open-pollinated were planted. Funk's Early Hybrid, furnished by the Funk Brothers Seed Company, outyielded the other strains. That same year, the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and the Black Hawk County Farm Bureau co-sponsored a Ten-Acre Yield Contest. The 1937 Variety Test in Grundy County, Iowa, included plots of the hybrid DeKalb 435 alongside open-pollinated varieties.[15]

During the 1930s, Ten-Acre Yield Contests directed by the Illinois Crop Improvement Association required that participating farmers purchase commercial seed at cost from the University of Illinois, grow it according to directions from college personnel, keep detailed records on conditions and harvest, and send their results to the college. Farmers routinely provided the land for the variety tests and often performed all the field work. In a 1936 variety test held in McLean County, Illinois, George Fissemiller provided land for a group of farm advisors and corn breeders to test one hundred twenty-five new hybrids, each grown in five separate plots.[16]

In the late-1930s, when hybrids had become widely accepted as superior to open-pollinated corn, farmers continued to use yield tests to find the best hybrid for local conditions. In 1940 when over 90 percent of all the corn grown in Jasper County, Iowa, was hybrid, the Farm Bureau sponsored two variety test plots, one in bottom soil and the other in upland soil, involving thirty-one hybrid varieties in order to find the best hybrid for each soil type. In addition, sixteen county farmers entered the state Ten-Acre Yield contest that year. In 1940, the Deuel County, South Dakota, Crop Improvement Association completed its Five-Year yield test, held on five representative farms in the county, comparing twenty-one hybrids and three open-pollinated varieties. The tests revealed that hybrids provided higher yields only if later-maturing varieties were planted. The open-pollinated seeds for the contest were furnished by the extension service, the South Dakota Crop Improvement Association and the state Experiment

Station; hybrid seed came from commercial breeders through the extension service.[17]

The corn shows and the corn yield tests helped establish the practice of farmers participating in production-related contests organized, promoted, and judged by personnel from the agricultural colleges, the extension service, and producer associations. In the case of the corn shows, this had an unintentionally adverse effect on productivity, but in the yield contests, the planting of hybrid seed eventually led to higher corn yields. The corn husking contests continued the participation of farmers in production-raising contests and taught many farmers the methods of scientific measurement and evaluation. The corn husking contests, however, had greater popular appeal than the earlier corn contests. While the earlier contests had mainly concerned corn breeders, the husking contests concerned all corn producers, from owner-operators to hired hands, because practically every midwesterner knew how to pick corn and could appreciate the achievements of good huskers. Plus, the corn husking contests became events in which many people and organizations could participate in a variety of supportive roles.

The idea for a corn husking contest was born in 1922 when Frank Faltonson, a retired farmer, visited Henry A. Wallace at his office during the harvest season. Faltonson believed that some of the husking claims made around the comfort of a wood stove were greatly exaggerated, and he believed that there should be some way to recognize the husker who did the best overall job of picking a field thoroughly and whose corn was relatively free from husks, not just the one who came in with the largest load.[18]

Wallace was intrigued by the possibility of holding a corn husking contest as a means of evaluating the husking claims made every year by farmers. Just as the corn yield tests had proven that scientifically-controlled performance testing was more reliable than popular wisdom in determining high yielding seeds, Wallace undoubtedly saw an opportunity

for using contests to possibly uncover some similar truth about corn husking. Wallace, like Faltonson, believed that many of the husking claims were exaggerated, but he was unable to prove it. Wallace also wanted to reduce the amount of time spent husking corn on Iowa's farms and make corn husking more competitive so that farmers would race against each other in an effort to quickly finish the husking job. In order to accomplish this, Wallace organized the first corn husking contest.[19]

Henry A. Wallace differed from many of his contemporaries in his attitude toward increasing agricultural production. Wallace believed that farmers should try to increase their profits not by simply increasing productive output, but rather by performing their work more efficiently. The use of efficient methods would lower farmers' operating costs, and thus would leave them with more money in their pockets. Wallace realized that increasing production without lowering costs could lead to lower farm income. "Speed counts in corn husking," Wallace wrote in October 1922, explaining that a fast husker, who wasted no motion in getting the corn from the stalk to the wagon, could quickly accomplish the repetitive fall field task and save the farmer labor costs. In 1923, Wallace estimated that the corn harvest would consume seven million days of man labor across the state. He believed that the job could be reduced to less than six million days of man labor if husking methods were made more efficient. Wallace emphasized efficiency over production, and he used the corn husking contests to promote efficient methods of corn harvesting.[20]

Wallace, together with Harold Hughes, Joe Robinson, L. C. Burnett, and A. A. Bryan, envisioned a corn husking contest as a scientific experiment, much like the yield contests. As such, they devised a set of conditions and rules to promote a certain type of husking. Wallace believed that the physical strength and stamina of the husker were significant factors in determining the efficiency of husking, so he began his contests with the assumption that adult males in good health and physical condition made the most efficient huskers. Wallace started his search for the best husker

within a select group--men between the ages of fifteen and forty who were able to husk at least fourteen bushels per hour. Within this preselected set, Wallace looked for common characteristics, such as age, weight, and height of each husker, their husking rate per hour, and even their ethnicity, much the same way that he looked for common characteristics among high-yielding seed corn. In 1925, Wallace wrote that the fastest corn huskers in the contests so far had been "powerfully built young men from twenty to thirty years of age . . . of unusual strength and vigor. In their ability to accomplish feats of physical dexterity and endurance they deserve to rank with the best athletes at Ames or Iowa City." From this starting point, Wallace hoped that the corn husking contests "will stimulate both the bodily and mental energies to a point at which discoveries are made" and husking methods improved. In 1939, a profile of the sixteen national husking champions from 1924 through 1939 showed that the average champion husker was a thirty-one year old male, weighing one hundred eighty pounds, and standing six feet tall.[21]

Henry A. Wallace started the corn husking contests primarily as a scientific experiment with goals similar to those of the corn yield contests, but he also realized that most men would enter his contest to compete for prizes and recognition, and not necessarily the pursuit of knowledge. Thus, Wallace emphasized the competitive nature of the contests to his readers, giving them incentive to enter and indirectly making the farm chore more enjoyable. In September 1923, Wallace wrote that the first husking contest had convinced him that the use of athletic rivalry in the contest could make husking at top speed positively enjoyable for thousands of men.[22]

Wallace, like other farm journal editors and extension staff members, believed that competition led directly to improvement by continually raising the standard of excellence. For evidence, he pointed to new records set in athletic events such as pole vaulting to make his point that the human body is capable of things not considered possible twenty

years earlier. For Wallace the contests were a scientific search for the best husking methods and the perfect physical characteristics which made the most efficient husker, but they also encouraged improvement of those husking methods by creating greater awareness of what was humanly possible in corn husking.[23]

Wallace believed that the competitive spirit found in modern sports could be developed in the corn husking contests. Twentieth-century sports, however, increasingly rewarded the values of industrial culture, values which Wallace, ironically, hoped to minimize in rural culture through the development of authentic rural recreation. In the early years of the contests, Wallace did not compare corn husking to any particular sport, but his uncle, Daniel Wallace, editor of the [Minnesota] Farmer, made a point of comparing the corn husking contests to the most popular autumn sport of the time, football. Football reflected certain elements of industrial culture; the players specialized by playing a particular position on a team, and competition was based on skill. The game was carried out according to logical, rational rules; it functioned within a formal structure, performance could be quantified, and the contestants pursued personal goals within the framework of team goals.[24]

Organized corn husking, like football, contained these elements of industrial culture. Corn husking was secular, the contestants had a specific skill, and they competed under logical, standardized rules within an overall organizing structure. Corn husking was responsive to quantification. Just as manufacturers kept track of the number of items produced in a given amount of time and determined their profit from amount of sales, corn huskers harvested a finite amount of corn in a given period of time and their worth as a husker could be determined by that amount. In each corn husking contest, the results of the huskers were reported as numerical values. The record of each husker showed not only that he won or lost, but how much he husked in a given period of time and the quality of that husking.

The comparison between football and corn husking fell short of perfection on several counts. Football was a team sport and corn husking was an individual task; football involved violent contact with a human opponent, while husking was a non-contact sport, more like a foot race than football. Nevertheless, the character traits needed for modern sports and for corn husking contests were also those required by industrial capitalism: superficial autonomy and aggressive independence combined with obedience, self-sacrifice, discipline, and adherence to a hierarchy of authority. In the words of Thorstein Veblen, "The physical vigour acquired in the training for athletic games . . . is of advantage both to the individual and to the collectivity, in that, other things being equal, it conduces to economic serviceability."[25]

Clifford Gregory, like Daniel Wallace, compared the corn husking contests to football. In November 1925, his editorial in Prairie Farmer called the husking contests "our national farm sport," and declared that the contests were coming to rival football as a popular national sport. Other midwestern farm journal editors repeated the football analogy because they believed that agriculture needed events like the corn husking contests to bring attention to farm life and create an interest among the urban public in farm affairs. Sam McKelvie, editor of the Nebraska Farmer, deviated from the football theme, but kept to sports when he described a state contest as "the world series in the corn field." Dan Wallace wrote that the contests encouraged rural recreation, good sportsmanship, and interaction between huskers, improved husking methods, and got farmers to cooperate.[26]

The husking contests were interesting to spectators because the keen competition could be translated directly to economic terms, "that the fellows who are shucking are really getting something done of economic value makes such competitions even more thrilling than most other American sports. One who enjoys a baseball game will enjoy a corn shucking contest more because the boys are really doing something of economic worth."[27]

While farm journal editors enthusiastically compared corn husking to popular sports, not all of their readers agreed. One Wallaces' Farmer reader objected to the contests, writing that "to make corn husking a sport strains the imagination." The writer found it "superfluous to enlarge on the hardship of real corn husking," charging that the contests were clearly products of a "swivel-chair office boss" who wanted to create a diversion or to interject "one more bit of city foolishness" into the farmer's activities. Clearly, the writer continued, "real farmers" would never organize such a contest for themselves, as they had more important work to attend. Lastly, the writer warned, contestants ran the risk of ruining their health and nervous system by husking corn so intensely for eighty minutes, putting the sake of publicity, pride, and prize money before their own well-being.[28]

This critic provided a fundamental insight when he made the point that "real farmers," that is, those who actually performed the manual work required in operating a farm, would never organize such a contest for themselves, but they would readily participate when it was organized for them. Agricultural production contests required the use of management and organizing skills to artificially construct and control an event that replicated actual conditions, but which existed in a world apart from them. The progressive technocrats from the agricultural colleges, the state extension services, and the farm journals possessed the time, financial resources, skills, knowledge, tools, associational networks, and the incentive to create and sustain the contests. The critic also correctly pointed out that individual huskers were willing to push themselves beyond normal work limits when they were assured of a positive reward in the form of recognition and cash.

Wallace began the corn husking contests on a write-in basis in 1922. Among the responses that Wallace received was a submission from twenty-year old Ben Grimmius Jr. of Grundy County. Grimmius had been urged to enter the contest by Lou Plager, at that time president of the Grundy

County Farm Bureau, who had learned of Wallace's contest and scouted the county for a promising husker. Plager heard that Grimmius claimed have husked two hundred thirty bushels of corn in ten hours and twenty minutes, an extraordinary amount. Grimmius sent Wallace a signed affidavit swearing that his claim was true. The amount that Grimmius claimed to be able to husk was astounding compared with the seventy-five bushels per day that the editor of the Grundy Register estimated the average Grundy County man able to husk.[29]

Wallace found it difficult to compare Grimmius' entry with the other contest entries: the length of work day varied among the huskers by as much as two or three hours, the size of the ears of corn varied across the state, and wet weather made some corn weigh heavier. Besides, Wallace had no way of knowing how "clean" the corn had been husked. Wallace, like many experienced farmers, believed that cleanly husked corn stored better than corn that had husks remaining on it. The general rule of thumb among farmers was that more than one hundred fifty husks per every hundred ears gave the corn a dirty appearance, attracting moisture and leading to rotting and mold.[30]

Wallace also had no way of knowing whether a husker had picked all of the ears in his rows, or had simply picked the biggest ears. Picking only the biggest ears was considered sloppy and inefficient because the rows would have to be picked again for the smaller ears, a task that took more time than picking the easier to find, large ears. A contest that rewarded speed and cleanness in husking would benefit the farm owner by encouraging hired pickers to get all the corn the first time through the field. Such a contest would also benefit hired pickers because they could learn how to get more clean corn from the field in less time. Since hired pickers were generally paid by the bushel, faster husking meant they could possibly increase their income.

Talking the matter over with his circle of fellow corn enthusiasts at Iowa State, Wallace decided to bring all the contestants together to husk

in a supervised contest and thus eliminate variables such as the length of the picking day, ear size, and quality of the corn field. In late November 1922, Wallace invited the top six huskers in the write-in contest to meet at one of his own corn fields near Johnston Station, Iowa, just north of Des Moines. There, on a bitterly cold December day, in a field of corn knocked down by the snow and the wind, Wallace held his first organized corn husking contest. A total of eleven people were present, including Plager and four other Grundy County residents who attended to cheer on Ben Grimmius Jr., who finished in second place.[31]

The 1922 contest lasted one hour. Wallace, Hughes, Robinson, Burnett, and Bryan acted as judges, weighers, and gleaners. The husker bringing in the heaviest net load won the contest, with all the others ranking behind him according to their net load weights. Louis Curley, from Lee County, won the contest with a net of fifteen bushels, and Grimmius ranked second, having husked just over fourteen net bushels of corn. Judges determined the net load weight by subtracting weight penalties from the gross load. The first penalty was for gleanings left behind in the field. For each pound of gleanings, two pounds were deducted from a husker's gross weight. The second penalty was the husk penalty. To determine the husk penalty, judges randomly selected one hundred ears from each husker's load. Any husks still clinging to an ear of corn were removed and counted. Each husker was allowed two hundred husks without penalty. The number of husks greater than two hundred were subtracted from the gross weight of the corn. In 1922, no husker had more than two hundred husks, thus the judges imposed no penalties.[32]

The December meet in 1922 convinced Wallace of the superiority of a contest which brought all the huskers together in one field. He felt that it was as important for huskers to be compared side by side, in the same field, under the same weather conditions, as it was for seed corn to be planted, grown, and harvested uniform conditions in a yield contest. When Wallace brought huskers from across Iowa together into one field for the

state contest, he learned that the type of corn made a great difference in husking performance. For one thing, ears with tightly wrapped husks took more time to husk than loose-husked corn. Subsequently, a husker's method depended on the type of corn being picked so that a fast, clean husker in one type of corn was not necessarily fast or clean in another type of corn.[33]

Given the variation in midwestern corn, it is not surprising that midwestern huskers used a variety of methods and tools. Some used a wooden peg, some a metal palm or thumb hook. Some huskers grabbed the ear near the middle, some near the top, and others grabbed the ear at the butt. Essentially, however, all huskers used a three-step motion: they grabbed the ear while slitting the husk, twisted or snapped the ear from the shank, and threw the ear into the wagon. Wallace carefully analyzed the various husking methods in the pages of Wallaces' Farmer in order to identify the exact combination of attributes that made the fastest husker. Wallace and the other journal editors carefully reported contests statistics on gross weight, gleaning deductions, husk deductions, and net weight, in addition to studying husking methods.[34]

Following the 1923 contest between the Illinois champion and the Iowa champion, Wallace analyzed their husking styles. Both John Rickelman of Iowa and Dallas Paul of Illinois used thumb hooks, although different brands. Their husking methods, however, were completely different. Rickelman used a "pinch and twist" husking method, grasping the ear at the butt with his left hand with his thumb up. The thumb hook on his right hand brushed the husks aside so that he could grasp the ear and give the twist which usually broke the ear cleanly from the husks. One drawback of the Rickelman method, noted Wallace, was that it sometimes resulted in a slip-shucked ear, but this seemed to be counterbalanced by the number of ears which were broken out almost totally clean. In large-eared corn, Rickelman's pinch and twist method resulted in very cleanly husked corn, but in small-eared corn it resulted in many of the nubbins carrying a lot

of husks. Wallace recommended the Rickelman method to "the man with a powerful left wrist." Dallas Paul, on the other hand, used the standard, thumb-down, hook method where the hook sliced through the husks, exposing the ear for picking. Wallace observed that Paul's free and easy, rhythmical swing made his husking more attractive to watch than Rickelman's. Rickelman earned one hundred fifty dollars in contest prize money, an amount that Wallace thought might seem excessive to some of his readers. He felt, however, that Rickelman had given the state of Iowa "value far greater than this" because, Wallace predicted, thousands of powerful huskers will adopt Rickelman's method and increase their ability by five or ten bushels per day.[35]

After applying a set of roughly-sketched rules to the 1922 December meet, Wallace, Hughes, and Bryan tinkered with the rules in order to make the contest more like actual husking, yet remain a fair contest with popular appeal. In 1923, Wallaces' Farmer published the more fully developed set of rules, which continued to encourage thorough picking and clean husking. The stated object of the contest was to "determine the contestant who can husk into the wagon the largest amount of ear corn, and who shall, at the same time, husk all the ears on the land covered, such corn when husked being reasonably free from husks." Wallace hoped that the rules would became widely adopted as a standard for everyday husking and would save labor. The rules required that the contest field be as uniform as possible and contain little or no variation in the yield of corn or size of ears. Equipment for the state contests, such as wagons, teams, and bangboards, were to be provided by the contest sponsors and needed to be as uniform as possible so as not to give any particular husker an advantage.[36]

Wallace and his advisors extended the contest length to eighty minutes in 1923. Wallace believed that at least one hour should be allotted for a contest "in order to interest spectators and stimulate the greatest diffusion of knowledge concerning methods." In theory, the eighty minute

contest provided enough time for a husker to find a rhythm, but not to fill more than one standard double box farm wagon. This assumption worked in most contests as huskers found it difficult to fill their wagon within the time limit. One wagon per contestant allowed the judges enough time to weigh and unload the corn, figure deductions, and compute the scores within a few hours.[37]

The rules penalized huskers who failed to pick thoroughly and cleanly. The 1923 rules charged two types of weight penalties against huskers similar to those imposed in 1922: one for ears missed in the field and picked up by gleaners, and the second for husks left on ears after husking. The gleaning deduction was the simplest; the weight of the gleanings was doubled and subtracted from the gross weight so that ten pounds of gleanings meant a twenty pound deduction. The husk deduction was more complicated than the gleaning deduction to compute, because it was based on a random sample of one hundred ears taken from each husker's gross load. After selecting the sample, judges removed and counted all the husks found on the sample ears. Beginning in 1923, each husker was allowed seventy-five husks in a one hundred ear sample without deductions; for each additional husk over seventy-five, one-tenth of 1 percent of the gross weight was subtracted from his score. For example, if one hundred husks were found in a one hundred ear sample taken from a two thousand pound gross load, the husk deduction would be fifty pounds [(.01 X 200) X 25 husks = 50). With the twenty pound gleaning deduction given above, the husker would be penalized a total of seventy pounds, resulting in a score of 1930 net pounds.[38]

In 1926, the sponsoring farm journals revised and standardized Wallace's rules among all state contests, making them more stringent. First, the gleaning deduction was increased to three times the weight of the gleanings, so that if a husker left ten pounds of gleanings in the field, thirty pounds were deducted from the gross weight. Judges examined the gleanings prior to weighing and threw out the unmarketable ears, such

as mouldy ears or nubbins. Second, the practice of counting the husks was replaced by weighing the husks. Under the new practice, huskers were allowed up to four ounces of husks without any deductions. Huskers leaving more than four but not more than eight ounces of husks in the sample were penalized 1 percent of the gross weight for each ounce in that range. Huskers with samples weighing eight ounces or more were penalized 3 percent of the gross weight for each ounce over eight. Floyd Keepers, a field editor of Nebraska Farmer, believed that the revised rules were valuable guidelines for encouraging farmers to gather more corn per day, husk more cleanly, and leave fewer gleanings when they harvested their fields.[39]

The 1926 rules also changed the way that huskers moved through the field. In the 1923 version of the rules, the huskers were started in intervals of ten minutes on succeeding rows, one contestant following another. In this arrangement, gleaners had to follow quickly behind their assigned husker before the next husker came along. In the 1926 rules, each husker was allotted a separate section of the field, four to ten rows wide and approximately eighty rods long, called a husking land. About this time, contest sponsors began to remove the corn stalks between the husking lands so that spectators could follow their favorite husker through the field and also to allow room for the wagons to maneuver. Host farmers removed between four and twelve rows, depending on the size of crowd they expected. A contest with ten to fourteen contestants required at least a forty-acre field so that each husker could have a separate land. Huskers rarely finished husking all the corn in their lands; at some early contests, the remaining corn was used for a second heat. Wallace recommended limiting county contests to no more than ten huskers so that the judges would have enough time to complete the scoring.[40]

Contest rules were not solely derived from the notions that farm journal editors and experiment station scientists had about proper husking methods. The rules were grounded in actual husking practices. When huskers

from across the Midwest met in a national husking contest, differences in husking methods, especially for different types of corn, surfaced. Also, ideas about what constituted fairness varied from region to region. Disputes arose about issues such as whether to husk from one row or two, and the use of sideline coaches. The rules used in the first contests in Iowa and Illinois recommended that only one row be husked at a time because separate drivers and wagons were provided for each husker, thus the wagons could move quickly through the field. In 1925, however, Wallaces' Farmer began to allow picking two rows at a time because many huskers leaned over and robbed ears from the second row anyway. When the Nebraska Farmer joined the contests in 1924, editor McKelvie recommended that huskers pick two rows at a time because that was common practice among Nebraska huskers, who objected to charges that they were cheating. A ban on coaches was adopted by the sponsoring farm journals in 1930 because not all huskers at the state and national contests could afford to bring along a coach, and thus were at a disadvantage compared to huskers with coaches, besides, coaching made the contests more artificial because a farmer husking at home did not use a coach. Most of the significant differences had been addressed, if not fully resolved, by 1928, when the Prairie Farmer reported that the national contest it sponsored in Indiana was the first big husking event ever held in which there was no complaint or misunderstanding of any sort among the huskers. Although this was probably an exaggeration, adjustments in the rules helped resolve differences among huskers.[41]

One perceptive criticism of the contests was that despite efforts otherwise, they still did not reflect real husking practices and conditions. A farmer from Faribault County, Minnesota, wrote to the Farmer suggesting that the corn picking contest should last eight hours because "lots of men can pick corn fast for an hour or two, though I think the best corn picker is the man who can keep it up for eight or ten hours." Dan Wallace agreed that huskers were hired to pick all day, not for just a

few hours, but he defended the eighty minute contest. Experience had shown Wallace that fast, short-time pickers were also good long-time pickers. He pointed out that huskers in the 1922 and 1923 write-in contests in Iowa had picked for eight hours or more, but that these contests "turned out to be endurance contests rather than sporting events. Short time contests keep the crowd interested and develop the easiest and fastest type of husking."[42]

In 1930, several years of practical experience with state and national contests led to another round of rule changes designed to speed up the husking and to have it more accurately reflect actual husking conditions. For instance, under the 1926 rules, contestants had been required to husk more cleanly than most farmers would have husked under similar circumstances. The revisions liberalized the deduction penalties, but still penalized dirty huskers and rewarded clean huskers. Other revisions in 1930 required huskers to pick up and place in the wagon all loose corn lying between the two rows being husked, an official field judge was added for each husker, huskers were required to pick from two rows at a time, the use of coaches was definitely prohibited, and the preliminary closing shot was deleted.[43]

Under the liberalized deduction penalties of 1930, contestants were allowed to have more husks in their load of corn than previously; up to five ounces of husks in a one hundred pound sample were allowed without penalty. Samples with husks weighing more than five ounces and up to ten ounces were penalized at 1 percent of the gross weight. Husks weighing over ten ounces were charged against the husker's score at 3 percent of the gross weight. For example, if a gross load weighing two thousand pounds was found to have eleven ounces of husks in a one hundred pound sample, the husker would have no deductions charged for the first five ounces of husks, but would have one hundred pounds deducted for the second five ounces of husks [5 ounces x (.01 x 2000) = 100 pounds], and sixty pounds deducted for the eleventh ounce [1 ounce x (.03 x 2000) = 60

pounds]. On a two thousand pound gross load of corn with eleven ounces of husks in a one hundred pound sample, the total deduction for husks would be one hundred sixty pounds. Combined with the gleaning deduction of thirty pounds as described above, total deductions for this example would be one hundred ninety pounds. The huskers' net weight, and final score, would be 2000 minus 190 = 1810 pounds. Thus huskers needed big loads combined with few husks and gleanings to win a contest.[44]

In more than one contest, the husker with the heaviest gross load was beaten by a husker with a lighter gross load that contained fewer husks and gleanings, making the net weight actually higher. At the 1931 national contest, Orville Welch picked by far the largest load, so that although four other men had fewer deductions than Welch, his big load saved his first place position. E. H. Hendricks had the third heaviest gross weight, but his deductions were the largest of the day, leaving him in sixth place. Lee Carey, who picked the second heaviest load, finished third with forty pounds more deductions than Theodore Balko of Minnesota, who finished in second place.[45]

The amount of corn husked in contests during the first three years was not remarkable, running between twenty and twenty-five net bushels in eighty minutes. The 1925 Midwest contest at Mercer County, Illinois, however, was held in a field of extremely high-yielding, open-pollinated Yellow Dent corn, estimated to yield between seventy and seventy-five bushels per acre. Husker Elmer Williams, of Galva, Illinois, set a new record, husking an unprecedented 35.8 bushels in eighty minutes, approximately ten bushels more than had ever been picked during a contest. The corn was so heavy that Williams required two standard double box wagons to hold it; his fans pitched in and pulled the loaded wagon out of the mud so that an empty one could be hitched to the mules. Williams reportedly "husked on without losing an ear." The deciding factors in setting a record, then, was not so much the skill, strength, and speed of

the husker, but such variables such as weather, condition of the corn, size of the ears, and the random assignment of a contest land.[46]

Wallace achieved one of his goals for the corn husking contests as early as 1922; he had found Iowa's fastest husker, but, he realized, only for one set of conditions. Every husking contest had a unique combination of conditions, usually falling short of Wallace's ideal. Based on his observations, however, Wallace was able to predict that "Where all of the conditions are favorable [no down corn, large ears, dry ground], first-class corn huskers can throw fifty to sixty ears of corn per minute into the wagon box, and keep it up for an hour."[47]

By 1928, Wallace had identified the fastest husking methods possible for most conditions found in midwestern corn fields, had established standards for measuring the work of corn husking and for comparing different types of husking, and had helped to spread an awareness of efficient husking methods through the Midwest. In November 1928 following the national contest in Indiana, Wallace wrote, "The methods followed by the champion huskers have been copied everywhere so that as the result of interest in these contests, probably a lot of folks all over the corn belt, especially the younger men, are doing the job with more speed and more ease than before." Dan Wallace agreed, and in November 1928, he wrote in the Farmer, "The corn husking contests have proven to be of distinct economic benefit to agriculture. Many farmers have told us that husking methods have been distinctly improved and speeded up as a result of setting up standards through these contests. Both farmers and huskers have profited as a result of recognizing efficiency."[48]

Despite the influence that Wallace believed the contests had on actual husking practices, he nevertheless concluded that the yield per acre, correlating positively to the size of the ears, had a greater influence on the amount of corn husked in a given period of time than did the use of a particular husking method. To demonstrate the influence of yield on the rate of husking, Wallace gave an example of a husker working in a field

yielding one hundred forty ears per acre. In that field, the average county contest winner harvested thirty-one ears a minute, but in two hundred fifty ear per acre corn, the average contest winner harvested about thirty-four ears a minute. Multiply the minutes by hours and the significance of ear size becomes apparent. Thus in higher-yielding corn fields of large-eared corn, average huskers harvested more corn in a given period of time than in low-yielding fields of smaller-eared corn. Corn husking contests were important, however, because like the corn shows and the yield tests, they helped establish the upper range of husking performance that farmers could expect under various conditions.[49]

Wallace felt no emotional attachment to the corn husking contests. He considered them useful tools, which, having served their purpose would soon be superseded by other agricultural contests. He wrote, "In time, the corn husking contest may share the fate of the old-time hay cutting contests. The mechanical corn picker may put the hand husker, with his peg or hook, in the same class as the old-time hay harvester, with his scythe . . . Athletic contests based on farm jobs are bound to change with the times. No one wishes them to do otherwise. The corn husking contest as it is now handled by the Standard Farm Papers, no matter what the future of the sport may be, has made a valuable contribution to the farm in lending to a gruelling fall job the zest of spirited competition and playful sport."[50]

Wallace, however, underestimated the popular appeal of the husking contests as rural recreation; the popularity the husking contests enjoyed during the 1920s and 1930s surprised Wallace and exceeded his expectations. Despite his enthusiasm for the contests as rural recreation, Wallace was never able to entirely disassociate them from their role as a production contest. In 1931 he reflected, "When I started the corn husking contests, I had no intention whatever of building it up into such a thing as it now is. However, I think we have added some zest to corn husking

with the result that many farm boys husk more rapidly and with greater pleasure than would otherwise be the case."[51]

Through the late-1920 and early 1930s, Daniel Wallace, Clifford Gregory, and others, nurtured the involvement of community organizations and agricultural equipment manufacturers in the contests, which helped stimulate mass appeal, which in turn helped the contests bring industrial culture into rural life. When the corn husking contests abruptly ended in 1941, the form they had created for a public, massive, outdoor, agricultural event was continued by the National Plowing Matches, events as much entertainment as agricultural contests. Henry A. Wallace was right, however, about the existence of a competitive spirit in rural life. The corn husking contests helped direct this spirit towards finding the limits, and stretching those limits, for agricultural production.[52]

Notes

1. Some examples of production contests held in Minnesota during the late 1920s include the Cow Profit Contest, sponsored Minnesota Extension Service and the Farmer, see the Farmer, 27 October 1928, 8; the Carload Baby Beef Breeding and Feeding Contest, sponsored by the University of Minnesota Experiment Farm and the Minnesota Livestock Breeders' Association, see [Minnesota] Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 28 September 1929, 5; and the Lamb Production Contest, sponsored by the Minnesota Livestock Breeders' Association and supervised by the Extension service, see Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 7 December 1929, 5. In Iowa,the Cow Herd Production Contest, sponsored by Iowa State College in the early 1920s, was a typical production contest, see Wallaces' Farmer, 18 August 1922, 1. Similar contests were held in other states, such as the egg laying contest sponsored by the Eastern Kansas Poultry Association, see Ottawa Herald, 8 October 1928. A thorough study of the relationship between contest culture and industrial agriculture is yet to be made.

2. "First Scientific Corn Yield Contest," Wallaces' Farmer, 9 November 1923, 9; Jack Ralph Kloppenburg Jr., First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology (New York.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 95-96.

3. Martin L. Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests and Related Later Programs (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1962), 71, 97; G. F. Sprague and J. C. Cunningham, "Growing the Bumper Corn Crop," in A Century of Farming in Iowa, 1846-1946, Members of the Staff of the Iowa State College and the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station (Ames: Iowa State College, 1946), 36; Henry A. Wallace and William L. Brown, Corn and Its Early Fathers rev. ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 83-85; "First Scientific Corn Yield Contest," Wallaces' Farmer, 9 November 1923, 9.

4. Perry G. Holden, "Selecting and Preparing Seed Corn," Bulletin 77, Iowa State Agricultural Extension Station (Ames: Iowa State College, 1904); "A Score Card for Corn and Suggestions for Corn Growers," Circular, Iowa State Agricultural Extension Station (Ames: Iowa State College, 1910); Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 97-103; Iowa Year Book of Agriculture, 1923 (Des Moines: Iowa State Department of Agriculture, 1923), 285-86; Deborah, Fitzgerald, The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890-1940 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 11-12, 141-42.

5. Kloppenburg, First the Seed, 95; "The Story of Reid's Yellow Dent Corn," Prairie Farmer, 20 January 1923, 3.

6. Richard A. Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers: Prophets of Plenty (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1947), 143-45; Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 16-17, 91; Wallace and Brown, Corn and Its Early Fathers, 88-89, 115.

7. Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 61-62, 75-77; Wallace and Brown, Corn and Its Early Fathers, 89.

8. For a discussion of Eugene Funk's yield experiments with show corn and his abandonment of University of Illinois scorecards as a guide for selecting seed corn, see Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers, 114-17, and Fitzgerald, The Business of Breeding, 141-44. Wallace and Brown, Corn and Its Early Fathers, 89; Wallaces' Farmer, 25 December 1919, quoted in Kloppenburg, First the Seed, 104. Kloppenberg uses this quote to show that Wallace wanted to retain the "superb popular theater" of the corn shows for the yield contests.

9. Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers, 99, 116-17, 148, 190-93; Sprague and Cunningham, "Growing the Bumper Corn Crop," 37; Iowa Year Book of Agriculture, 1923, 283-86; Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 90-91, 101-02. "Monster State Corn Show to be Held at Ames," Wallaces' Farmer, 11 January 1924, 59; "Iowa's Fifth Corn Yield Contest," Wallaces' Farmer, 7 March 1924, 5.

10. Iowa Year Book of Agriculture, 1930, (Des Moines: Iowa State Department of Agriculture, 1930), 184; Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 90-93; "Iowa's Fifth Corn Yield Contest," Wallaces' Farmer, 7 March 1924, 5.

11. Iowa Year Book of Agriculture, 1930, 184; Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers, 149-50; Kloppenburg, First the Seed, 103-7; Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 93-94.

12. Kloppenburg, First the Seed, 103; Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers, 102.

13. J. N. Price, "Fulton County, 1924," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: Illinois T858 R11 (Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1914-1944), 5-6, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: Illinois; Harrison Fahronkopf, "McLean County, 1924," County Agents' Reports: Illinois T858 R11, 1; George Kennard, "Minnehaha County, 1928" Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: South Dakota T888 R17

(Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1913-1944), 1, 5, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: South Dakota.

14. Fitzgerald, The Business of Breeding, 127; "Jackson County, 1932," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: Kansas T861 R59 (Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1913-1944), 35, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: Kansas; Meadville Messenger, 29 October 1931; 19 November 1931.

15. Lou Plager, "Grundy County, 1926," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: Iowa, Cooperative Extension Service, (Ames: Iowa State University, 1912-1944), 22-23, Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: Iowa; Plager, "Grundy County, 1932," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 40-41; Plager, "Grundy County, 1934," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 22-23; Paul Barger, "Black Hawk County, 1934" County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 96-98; Plager, "Grundy County, 1937," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 16.

16. Metamora Herald, 13 November 1936.

17. Harry L. Bryson, "Jasper County, 1940," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 24; A. O. Syverud, "Deuel County, 1940," County Agents' Reports: South Dakota T888 R51, 13.

18. Reeves Hall, "First Iowa Husking Meets," Palimpsest 24, no. 11 (November 1943): 333-47; Arthur T. Thompson, foreword to Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards: Complete Digest of Corn Husking Records, Leonard J. Jacobs (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1975), xvii.

19. Hall, "First Iowa Husking Meets," 333-47; Leonard J. Jacobs, "Kings of the Hill: Illini Huskers, 1924-1941," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 76, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 205-12.

20. "Speed Counts in Corn Husking," Wallaces' Farmer, 27 October 1922, 3; "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; "Who is Iowa's Champion Corn Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 27 October

1922, 4; Richard S. Kirkendall, in "The Mind of a Farm Leader," Annals of Iowa 47, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 138-53, evaluates Wallace's use of the corn husking contests to generate interest in agricultural efficiency.

21. "Last Call for Corn Huskers," Wallaces' Farmer, 17 November 1922, 4; "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; "Iowa's Champion Corn Husker," Wallaces' Farmer, 15 December 1922, 3; "Rickelman of Lee County Wins," Wallaces' Farmer, 30 November 1923, 3; "Iowa Wins Mid-West Championship," Wallaces' Farmer, 5 December 1924, 9; "$300 in Prizes for Corn Huskers," Wallaces' Farmer, 25 September 1925, 3; "Who is the Champion Corn Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 12 September 1924, 3. The composite of the physical attributes of past national champion huskers was compiled by the [Davenport] Democrat, 29 October 1940, 20, in conjunction with the 1940 national contest.

22. "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3.

23. "Who is Iowa's Champion Corn Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 27 October 1922, 4; "Who is the Champion Corn Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 12 September 1924, 3.

24. Allen Guttman, From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 15-16, 128-29.

25. Michael S. Kimmel, "Baseball and the Reconstruction of American Masculinity, 1880-1920," in Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives, eds. Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books, 1990), 55-65; Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, quoted in Kimmel, "Baseball and the Reconstruction of American Masculinity, 60.

26. "Our National Farm Sport," Prairie Farmer, 28 November 1925, 8; "The World Series in the Corn Field," Nebraska Farmer, 10 November 1925, 3; "The Corn Husking Contests," Farmer, 27 November 1927, 6.

27. Meadville Messenger, 2 November 1933.

28. "Against the Corn Husking Contest," Wallaces' Farmer, 14 November 1924, 11.

29. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 7 December 1922; 26 November 1925.

30. "Speed Counts in Corn Husking," Wallaces' Farmer, 27 October 1922, 3; "Husking Down Corn on a Cold Day," Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7.

31. Hall, "First Iowa Husking Meets," 336; "Husking Down Corn on a Cold Day," Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7.

32. "Husking Down Corn on a Cold Day," Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7.

33. "Rickelman of Lee County Wins," Wallaces' Farmer, 30 November 1923, 3.

34. "Husking Down Corn on a Cold Day," Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7.

35. "Iowa Husker Beats Illinois Champ," Wallaces' Farmer, 7 December 1923, 5.

36. "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3.

37. "Husking Down Corn on a Cold Day," Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7; "Rules Governing State Husking Contest," Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1924, 5.

38. "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; "Rules Governing State Husking Contest," Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1924, 5.

39. "Where Are the Champion Huskers?" Wallaces' Farmer, 24 September 1926, 3; "Williams Holds Illinois Championship," Prairie Farmer, 20 November 1926, 3; "Hey Shucker!" Missouri Ruralist, 1 October 1926, 3; "How the Champions Husk Corn," Nebraska Farmer, 16 October 1926, 3.

40. The rows in a square forty-acre field are typically considered to be eighty rods long; eighty rods equals one-quarter of a mile. "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; "Where Are the Champion Huskers?" Wallaces' Farmer, 24 September 1926, 3.

41. "Who is Iowa's Champion Husker?" Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; "Rules Governing State Husking Contest," Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1924, 5; "Local Husking Contests," Wallaces' Farmer, 16 October 1925, 8; "Can 'Cornhuskers' Husk Corn?" Nebraska Farmer, 4 October 1924, 8; "Now for the Corn Husking Contest," Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 11 October 1930, 6; "Olson is World's Champion Husker," Prairie Farmer, 24 November 1928, 3.

42. "About Corn Picking," Farmer, 13 November 1926, 8.

43. "Now for the Corn Husking Contest," Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 11 October 1930, 6; "Polish Up the Husking Hooks," Nebraska Farmer, 27 September 1930, 3.

44. "Now for the Corn Husking Contest," Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 11 October 1930, 6; "Pick Iowa's Fastest Husker," Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 27 September 1930, 3.

45. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 19 November 1931.

46. "Williams is Illinois Champion Husker," Prairie Farmer, 21 November 1925, 3. Elmer Williams, who won the Illinois state contest again in 1926, held the national record for the most corn husked in eighty minutes until 1932 when another Illinois husker, Carl Seiler, husked 36.9 bushels in a Henry County, Illinois corn field, see "Seiler Breaks World Husking Record," Prairie Farmer, 26 November 1932, 3. Before the end of the corn husking contest era, the national record would be beaten two more times: in 1935, Elmer Carlson of Iowa husked 41.52 bushels of corn in Fountain County, Indiana, see "Iowa's Champion Wins National," Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 23 November 1935, 3, and in 1940, Irvin Bauman

of Illinois husked 46.58 bushels of corn in Scott County, Iowa, see "Meet the Champion," Prairie Farmer, 16 November 1940, 1.

47. "Husking Down Corn on a Cold Day," Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7.

48. "Corn Husking Contests," Wallaces' Farmer, 23 November 1928, 4; "The Corn Huskers," Farmer, 10 November 1928, 8.

49. "Huskers Compete for State Honors," Wallaces' Farmer, 9 November 1928, 3.

50. "Corn Husking Contests," Wallaces' Farmer, 23 November 1928, 4.

51. "Corn Husking Contests," Wallaces' Farmer, 23 November 1928, 4; Henry A. Wallace, Des Moines, Iowa, to A. O. Clark, Atlantic, Iowa, 30 November 1931, Ia58-952, Henry A. Wallace Papers at the University of Iowa Libraries, ed. Earl M. Rogers (Iowa City: University of Iowa Libraries, 1975).

52. For a discussion on the origins of the National Plowing Matches, as conceived by Herb Plambeck of radio station WHO of Des Moines, Iowa, in 1939, see Herb Plambeck, "This is Herb:" With Never a Dull Moment, 4th ed., rev. (Ames, Iowa: Sigler Printing and Publishing, 1994), 58-63, 122-24.

ORGANIZING THE CONTEST STRUCTURE

The corn husking contests evolved within a framework of cooperative relationships which developed among the editors of midwestern farm journals, state agricultural college administrators and professors, experiment station scientists, extension service employees, and progressive farmers. These cooperative relationships were a mixture of personal, associational, and institutional affiliations and friendships among men committed to increasing agricultural production by adopting the values and methods of industry and science. Among these groups and individuals, the farm journals played the most important role, for they created, developed, supervised, and sustained the corn husking contests. As the contests continued, they came to embody some of the political and economic ideas influencing the nature of industrial agriculture: competition tempered by cooperation, government guided by managers and technicians and operating at regional, state and local levels, centralization of policy authority, and decentralization of intermediate and routine authority.

The cooperative-competitive relationship existing among the various midwestern farm journals influenced the contest framework. Each journal reported on agriculture within a political and geographic region which roughly corresponded to a midwestern state. Thus, Iowa farmers who grew corn and fed livestock found that the editorials and articles published in Wallaces' Farmer reflected their interests and concerns, both in farming and in state laws affecting farming and rural life. Prior to World War I, several farm journals had formed the Standard Farm Paper Association in order to reduce their competition over advertising accounts. By 1914, fourteen farm papers belonged to the association, including Wallaces' Farmer, the Prairie Farmer, the Wisconsin Agriculturalist, the [Minnesota] Farmer, and the Missouri Farmer. After the Standard Farm Papers, the Capper Farm Press was the next largest association of agricultural publications in the Midwest. Several Capper farm journals, such as the

Missouri Ruralist, the Kansas Farmer, the Ohio Farmer, and the Pennsylvania Farmer also belonged to the Standard Farm Papers to equally share advertising profits.[1]

The Standard Farm Paper Association supplied bulk advertising to its members. An advertiser could purchase a package which included running the same advertisement in several journals simultaneously. This arrangement was possible because the journals had agreed to standardize column widths, advertising rates, and customer relations. In the 1920s, the Prairie Farmer, for example, received almost three-quarters of its advertising through the Standard Farm Paper Association.[2]

The editors of each journal worked together, creating regular features that could be used by any member of the association. Features included Dr. Holland's Sermonettes, Gilbert Gusler's Market Service, I. W. Dickerson's Agricultural Engineering Service, Mr. Flood's Travels, The Lazy Farmer, and the cartoon strip "Slim and Spud." During the 1920s, each independently-owned publication helped finance, staff, and maintain the association's offices in New York and Chicago.[3]

In spite of their cooperation in advertising and their sharing of editorial features, the journals competed for readers. A journal could reasonably expect that most of its subscribers would live within its state of publication, but journal subscription did not always follow state lines. Editors were constantly worried that another journal would draw away readership, especially subscribers living near state lines who might find that another journal was more sympathetic to their specific farming concerns than the journal published in their own state. These fears were not without foundation; the Prairie Farmer, for example, had a strong readership in western Indiana and southern Wisconsin, and the Farmer, published in St. Paul, circulated in eastern sections of both North and South Dakota.

In 1925, total readership of the state-based midwestern farm journals reached over one million, or about one-third of the entire nation's farm

families. Every journal editor wanted to attract as many of those readers as possible. The Prairie Farmer was fairly successful at expanding the size of its readership, which grew from 172,258 in 1925 to 340,293 in 1941. The paper increased its readership by drawing more than half of its readers from surrounding states, especially Indiana. By comparison, Wallaces' Farmer enjoyed less circulation than the Prairie Farmer for many years, however, its readership increased to a quarter of a million after acquiring the Iowa Homestead in 1933. Total readership of the Capper Farm Press, one of the largest publication syndicates in farm journalism at the time, ranged from 1.5 million to 2 million readers.[4]

A state-based farm journal's circulation was generally considered saturated when it reached 75 to 90 percent of all the farms in one state. Often, the only direction left for growth was to increase geographic coverage. Readership encroachment was taken as a serious threat by some journals, and occasionally, a farm journal protected its monopoly over a group of readers with a legal agreement. In 1930, the Prairie Farmer's owner Burridge Butler pledged not to solicit additional subscriptions in Wisconsin beyond existing levels. In return, Wisconsin Agriculturalist owner Dante Pierce agreed to end his efforts to sell subscriptions in Illinois and Indiana.[5]

The corn husking contests provided an opportunity for the journals to redirect some of their business competition into a cooperative ritual. Each journal wanted to sponsor the biggest and best national contest when their turn came and to provide the opportunity for a husker from their state to become a national champion. Editor John F. Case of the Missouri Ruralist expressed this competitive spirit when he wrote, "What a fine thing it would be for Missouri to step in and smash the hopes of both of them [Iowa and Illinois]." Case felt that the honor of hosting the national contest would be greatly enhanced "if a Missouri shucker tops the heap when the contest ends" because "we dislike to think of Missouri holding the National contest and letting a fellow from another state win

it." Desire alone did not make it so. No Missouri husker ever placed first in a national contest. The same disgrace haunted Kansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, all unable to propel a state winner into a national champion.[6]

In 1926, the Standard Farm Papers became the central governing body of the national corn husking contests when Henry A. Wallace turned his ad hoc duties over to a committee of midwestern journal owners and editors. The committee planned national contests, approved rule changes, and generally administered the contests. All together, Wallaces' Farmer, the Prairie Farmer, the Nebraska Farmer, the Kansas Farmer, the Farmer, and the Missouri Ruralist sponsored contests in eight states, shaping and controlling the contest structure. Any farm journal wanting to send huskers to the national contest had to be a member of the Standard Farm Papers. The association disbanded in December 1930 under financial strain, but within a month, the midwestern journals had reorganized into the Farm Paper Unit, which continued to sponsor and supervise the corn husking contests.[7]

The core associational relationships in the corn husking contests developed out of the friendship of a small group of men whose paths had crossed at Iowa State College in the first decade of the twentieth century. This group essentially revolved around Henry A. Wallace and his teachers, classmates, and friends, including Clifford Gregory, who became editor of the Prairie Farmer in the 1920s, Harold D. Hughes and L. C. Burnett, scientists and teachers at Iowa State College, and Lou Plager, who became an extension agent in Grundy County, Iowa. The friendship between Wallace and Gregory was especially important for the development of cooperation between the farm journals in organizing the national corn husking contests. Wallace and Gregory both entered Iowa State College with the 1906 freshmen class, studied under professor Hughes, and both graduated with a degree in animal husbandry in 1910. Lou Plager was a year ahead of Wallace and Gregory at Iowa State, also majoring in animal

husbandry, and, because of his high campus profile as center for the college's football team, was probably known by both Wallace and Gregory. After becoming editors of farm journals, Wallace and Gregory developed working relationships with various agricultural groups and spokesmen for agriculture, including Sam McKelvie, publisher of the Nebraska Farmer and Samuel Capper, owner of the Capper Paper syndication.[8]

Together, the farm journal editors controlled the form and nature of the corn husking contests, using them to promote industrial agriculture. The supervision of each journal's state contest was routinely delegated to a staff member, known as the corn husking editor, who worked with county agents and the local sponsoring committees. The farm journals acted as gatekeepers for contest entry by setting minimum standards, evaluating huskers' efforts, and selecting qualified huskers to advance to the next level of competition. The farm journals identified and approved host communities and host farmers for contests. The farm journals rewarded the participation of huskers with cash, travel money, trophies, and notoriety; they recruited reputable officials and judges whose decision would be accepted as final; they were the official timekeepers in state and national contests; they kept the contests secular and non-partisan; they set the contest schedule; and they initiated entertainment appropriate to an event open to the public. Each farm journal had a slightly different method for inviting huskers to state contests. Most editors left the screening of contestants up to their corn husking editors, but Henry A. Wallace took an active part in selecting huskers for Iowa contests. Wallace thought of the contests as scientific experiments designed to discover the methods used by the fastest husker. Once he discovered the most efficient method of husking, Wallace wanted to share it with all farmers. Wallace, unlike the other journal editors, possessed the resources to carry out the contests as scientific experiments. He used his own corn fields for the first contests, and counted on his friends at the agricultural college and experiment station, who shared his enthusiasm for

conducting the contests as scientific experiments, to act as weighers and judges.

For his first contest in 1922, Henry A. Wallace personally reviewed the husking record of each contestant that was mailed to him. Wallace had published an entry blank in the 27 October edition of Wallaces' Farmer and had asked interested huskers to follow the instructions on it, complete it, and mail it back to him along with a statement from an officer of a county farmers' organization authenticating the huskers claim. Wallace and his staff then compared the entries and selected the huskers with the fastest husking record for the Midwest contest. The following year, 1923, Wallace offered two ways to enter the husking contest. One way was through a county contest organized by a county extension agent or Farm Bureau officer. The other was through the entry blank method used the year before. Although Wallace encouraged county contests, none were held in Iowa until 1926. Instead, Iowa huskers mailed their husking records directly to Wallace.[9]

Wallace derived the number of contestants that he could accept into a contest from the time required to score each husker's load of corn, approximately fifteen minutes. In a contest with ten huskers and one set of judges, scoring required about two and a half hours. Consequently, the scoring took almost twice as long as the contest itself. With scoring time in mind, Wallace limited state contest entries to between eight and twelve huskers. In 1925, Wallace received contest entries from over seventy Iowa men, which he had to narrow down to the ten best huskers. In an article in Wallaces' Farmer, he explained the difficulty of comparing the entries of husking which had occurred in all parts of the state in various weather conditions and with different sized ears of corn. Fairness to all the huskers was Wallace's main concern, one which huskers shared. In 1924, a few disappointed huskers had come to the state contest grumbling about not being allowed to enter even though they had sent in entries which should have earned them a position in the contest. Wallace again suggested the

county contest as a better method of narrowing the field of contestants. Wallace asked his readers to give him their opinion on the matter before he made his final decision.[10]

At the beginning of the 1926 contest season, Wallace discontinued the write-in entry method for the Iowa contest, requiring instead that huskers win a county contest in order to become eligible for a state contest. Wallace urged huskers to contact their county agent, president of the local farm organization, editor of the county newspaper, community club, Rotary, or any similar organization and ask them to organize a corn husking contest. By 8 November, almost twenty Iowa county groups had organized and held contests. The majority of the contests were sponsored by farm bureaus, but at least two newspapers, a Farmers' Union group, a Chamber of Commerce, and a Rotary club had also organized and conducted contests.[11]

While Wallace gave the impression that the requirement for state contestants to have won a county contest derived from popular pressure and the need for greater fairness in selecting state contest participants, it may have resulted from an agreement made among the members of the Standard Farm Papers. Like Wallaces' Farmer, the Prairie Farmer, the Nebraska Farmer, and the Missouri Ruralist also implemented the county contest requirement in 1926.

The local control over contest entry given to county groups and organizations allowed county agents working through farm bureau committees to set minimum standards for participation and to screen out certain types of contestants. In 1928, Wright County, Iowa, required that contestants have the ability to husk one hundred thirty-five bushels per day, an extremely tough standard to meet. Entries were further limited "to men who have been vouched for by the farm bureau of each man's township and by persons living in Wright County." Some counties only allowed residents to enter and specifically barred transient corn huskers. In Cedar County, Iowa, the site of the 1929 state contest, only farmers who had lived in

the county thirty days or more with a good husking record were welcome to enter. Contestants were required to pay a one dollar entry fee, to be refunded later or forfeited by any registered husker who did not show up to compete. While an entry fee was unusual, most counties did require that huskers fill out a registration form prior to the contest. In Grundy County, huskers wanting to enter the contest were required to file an application with the Farm Bureau. African Americans and Hispanics were effectively screened out of the contests at the local level. Women, however, occasionally were able to convince their county agent and local farm bureau leaders to hold a separate contest for them.[12]

Finding a community to host the 1926 state contest was Wallace's next concern. He had personally hosted Iowa's first three contests, but perhaps influenced by Clifford Gregory's efforts to involve local communities, Wallace agreed with Iowa farm organizations and civic groups that the contest should rotate as a special activity among Iowa communities. In September 1926, Wallace solicited applications for a state contest host community with a column titled, "Who Wants the State Corn Husking Contest?" Wallace explained that staging a contest was a "bother" because of all the work involved. For civic hosts, Wallace wanted secular, non-partisan, and non-profit organizations identified with a particular geographic location, such as a town or a county.[13]

Town groups were advised to consider several factors before making their application. The contest had to be scheduled to allow contestants and spectators sufficient time to return home before chore time. Teams and wagons, gleaners, and other volunteers all needed to be found and organized. A large blackboard for posting the scores of each contestant needed to be set up so that it was clearly visible to the crowd. A corn field having large-eared corn on straight-standing stalks not damaged by wind or hail needed to be available. Finally, the contest needed to be limited to about ten huskers. Wallaces' Farmer cautioned that before any community made an application it should be sure that the husking field was

located near a good road, preferably paved. The journal was prepared to assist with the arrangements as much as possible, Wallace wrote, but it wanted volunteer workers to carry the event through. The Grundy County Farm Bureau, represented by Lou Plager, successfully bid for the 1926 state contest.[14]

The farm journal ideal of the modern farm best suited for hosting a corn husking contest developed both from experience and from ideas about scientific farm management. Journal editors quickly learned that farms with certain features of size, shape, topography, and proximity to a paved road made large contests easier to plan and manage. Locating such a farm was not necessarily easy, and farm paper editors together with agricultural college representatives spent several days each year searching for the perfect contest site. The process of selecting a contest field became more complicated and required more planning as the contests continued. For the first contests, journal editors simply scouted the county for a corn field that met their requirements, as for the 1927 state contest, when the Nebraska Farmer sought a contest site in the eastern third of the state. The journal was looking for a lister-planted, fifty acre field of large-eared, yellow corn yielding at least fifty bushels per acre. The field needed to be uniform, level, and clear of weeds and trash. The Nebraska Farmer wanted a contest field located on or near a main traveled, improved highway and with ample parking space in adjoining fields. The farm needed to have an open field or pasture at one end of the husking rows for the wagons to turn around and the crowd to follow. The farm needed to be located within a quarter-mile of a good wagon scale and have access to portable elevators. In addition to such a field site, the Nebraska Farmer sought a community or local organization willing to promote the contest and to look after the details and recruit volunteer workers. Remarkably, the journal found a farm in Seward County that met most of its criteria.[15]

Although promoters sought perfectly uniform fields, in reality most fields contained sections of thin corn where pollination had been uneven or where the land was low with wet areas. In Minnesota, contest organizers looked mainly for a field with a good stand of corn. Even with this simple criteria, organizers reported considerable difficulty in finding a field that "stood well" for the 1929 Minnesota state contest. Finally, they located a field grown by Ray Hanson of Cottonwood County that was "above average in this respect." Each corn hill in Hanson's field supported three stalks of corn with fairly uniform ears in terms of size and soundness, most growing at the height of "a man's hip." The yield was estimated to run between fifty and sixty bushels per acre.[16]

The farm used for at the 1930 Minnesota state contest represented the epitome of what promoters sought for a contest. Berry Akers, corn husking editor of the Farmer, accompanied by a representative from the University of Minnesota, made several trips through southwestern Minnesota to find a suitable contest field before they located the John Holmberg farm. Holmberg was a recognized leading farmer of the county, who operated his farm in cooperation with his four sons, three of them graduates of the Minnesota School of Agriculture. The Farmer general editor Dan A. Wallace described the Holmberg farm on the day of the contest, "First, picture a smashing good eighty-acre field of high-quality corn husking out this year at around seventy bushels of fully matured solid corn. Picture also the well kept farmstead near by. Grouped around this field you will note nearly two thousand modern automobiles that carried the six or seven thousand enthusiastic rural sportsmen who journeyed . . . from all sections of the Northwest to see the greatest sporting event in rural America. . . . Here you will find good will, comradeship, sportsmanship, community interest, cooperation - all associated with friendly competition. These are very important factors in promoting community, state, and national progress."[17]

The standards for corn fields set by the farm journals for their corn husking contests influenced the way that some farmers, especially those wanting to host contests, prepared their fields. To ensure that a field meeting their requirements would be available in the fall, corn husking editors began to suggest methods, equipment, and supplies for farmers to use in planting, fertilizing, and cultivating their fields. Typically, a journal would arrange for several fields within a specific area to be prepared for a state or national contest, as Wallaces' Farmer did in Ringsted County, Iowa, for the 1938 state contest. By preparing more than one field, sponsors reduced the chances of damage to the corn from hail, wind, rain, or insects, and increased the chance of getting the best possible stand of corn. Because the corn husking editors and farmers sought the same outcome from the corn fields--high yields, straight-standing corn, clean fields free from weeds, and good germination--the contests influenced farmers some to use the techniques of scientific field culture encouraged by the farm journals.[18]

In 1926, Wallace selected a forty-acre corn field on the Dick Boven farm in Grundy County for the Iowa state contest. That year, twelve county contest winners advanced to the state contest. Harold D. Hughes and L. C. Burnett from Iowa State College refereed the contest, Wallace timed the contest, and Lou Plager weighed the wagons. A farmers' committee took charge of the local arrangements which included providing refreshments served by the Palermo Township Farm Bureau ladies committee. J. J. Vanderwicken, editor of the Grundy Register, estimated that a crowd of twenty-five hundred people visited the contest, driving some seven hundred automobiles from thirty-nine Iowa counties to create "what was without a doubt the biggest gathering ever seen at any farm in Grundy county." Wallace was very pleased with the way the state contest turned out and with the enthusiasm shown by the community groups involved in carrying out the contest.[19]

In 1927, Henry A. Wallace briefly considered discontinuing the county contests, but when twenty Iowa communities informed him that they were planning contests for that year, he decided to continue them. Wallace, however, took a personal hand in selecting state contestants so that only the best huskers would advance to the state contest. Wallace felt that too strict of an adherence to the county contest system might eliminate some very good huskers just because they did not place first in their county contest. He knew that a second place winner in some counties, like Grundy, could husk faster and cleaner than many first place winners from other counties.[20]

Wallace wanted to identify about eleven huskers for the 1927 state contest. He collected the final scores from the county contest organizers and selected the eight highest-scoring huskers for the state contest. The remaining three places Wallace personally filled with the top finishers in an elimination meet. In this way, Wallace combined the county contest system with an elimination meet, and his own personal selection of huskers who held outstanding records, to identify the state contestants. Early in the spring of 1927, Webster County extension agent R. C. Ferguson had invited Wallace to hold the state contest in that county. Wallace accepted the invitation, perhaps influenced by the fact that Fred Stanek, the reigning corn husking champion of both Iowa and the Midwest, was a resident of the county and active in that county's Farm Bureau. Stanek won the state contest that year and advanced to the national contest where he successfully defended his crown, winning the national title for the third time. In 1930, Stanek won the national championship for his fourth and last time.[21]

In 1928, still trying to bring the very best huskers together in one contest, Wallace again supervised the selection of state contestants. As in the previous year, Wallace examined county contest scores and picked the top seven huskers winners of county contests. He then selected three more huskers on the basis of their past performances in contests. The

remaining two contestants were chosen in an elimination contest. Wallace, like all the state journal editors, wanted a husker from his state to win the national contest, and he took measures to ensure that the best huskers had a chance to compete. The contests, however, meant more to Wallace than just winning and losing. Wallace believed that it was possible to find the best husker, study his methods, and teach those methods to other farmers in order to make corn husking more efficient.[22]

Wallace continued the elimination contests for the next three years, adjusting the rules as necessary to include proven huskers. In 1932 he discontinued the elimination contest on the grounds that it required too much speed husking just prior to the state match and thus was hard on the huskers. From then on, contestants for the state contest were chosen only from county contest winners by Wallaces' Farmer. Despite the discontinuation of the elimination contests, Wallace still believed that the county contest system did not do a good job of identifying the very best huskers, so in 1932, in order to compare more huskers at one time, he expanded the state contest to eighteen huskers. After 1933, when he moved to Washington, D. C. to serve as Secretary of Agriculture, Wallace no longer played an active role in selecting huskers for the Iowa contests. In 1933, one of the peak years for the husking contests in Iowa, over seventy of the ninety-nine counties held corn husking contests, which prompted Wallaces' Farmer corn husking editor William Drips to raise the number of huskers admitted to the state contest to twenty-five. During the mid-1930s, Wallaces' Farmer held the number of huskers invited to the state contest to between fifteen and twenty, depending on the number of county contests each year.[23]

In 1938, Wallaces' Farmer began using district elimination contests in which all county winners had to participate to win a berth in the state contest. The top three huskers from each of five district contests advanced to the state meet, where the fifteen district champions plus the reigning title holder competed for the state title. The number of Iowa

county contests reached an all time high in 1940, the year that Iowa hosted the national contest. In that year, over eight hundred men competed in seventy-nine county contests. The eight district contests narrowed the field to sixteen of Iowa's best huskers, plus the reigning champion, for the state contest.[24]

Dan A. Wallace, editor of the Farmer, was an eloquent voice for the contests as rural recreation and this attitude shaped contest development in Minnesota just as Henry A. Wallace's concept of the contests as a scientific experiment had shaped the Iowa contest. Before the start of the 1926 contest season, Dan Wallace wrote, "Our aim in sponsoring this contest is to develop interest in better and faster husking methods, and to promote corn husking as an ideal home-grown farm sport." A month later, Dan Wallace continued his theme of rural recreation, writing, "This year, as last, the corn husking contest proved to be the keenest sort of rural recreation. . . . This sort of contest furnishes clean, wholesome competition that develops the best type of sportsmanship on the part of both contestants and spectators." Yet, in spite of their different emphasis on the common goal of promoting industrial agriculture, both editors understood the necessity of keeping their state contest within the overall framework established by the Standard Farm Papers so that their state huskers could compete fairly with huskers from other states. In a sense, this idea of leveling the playing field for all huskers was paralleled in agricultural politics where farmers wanted to be able to compete fairly and under common rules and laws.[25]

Minnesota's contests began like those in Iowa; huskers sent in a witnessed statement, and Dan A. Wallace selected huskers with the outstanding records to compete in the state championship. The Farmer used mail-in entry blanks for the first two state contests: in Martin County in 1925 and in Faribault County in 1926. In 1927, the Farmer, following the practice of the other journals, instituted county contests. Huskers living in communities that did not hold a local contest were still allowed to use

the mail-in entry method, but their scores had to be competitive with other county winners in order to be invited to the state contest. Realistically, this rule applied mostly to huskers in South Dakota where the farm bureau system was less firmly established than in southern Minnesota. In 1928, the Farmer stopped accepting write-in entries altogether, requiring all state contestants to have competed in county or local contests.[26]

Most county contests in Minnesota were organized like those in other states -- by the county agent working with the farm bureau. Occasionally, however, organizations other than the Farm Bureau sponsored contest, as in 1928 and 1929 when the Montevideo News sponsored the Chippewa County contest because the county did not have a county agent. In 1929, the local chapter of the American Legion sponsored the Redwood County contest, but county agent Nate Bovee supervised the event. In all cases, the Farmer required that established contest rules be followed.[27]

The Nebraska Farmer began holding state corn husking contests in 1924. Journal editor Samuel McKelvie arranged two contest entry methods, which were similar to those used in Iowa and Minnesota. Huskers could enter either by mailing in an official nominating blank, or they could compete in local contests. Either way, the journal would choose eight of the best corn huskers from the written records submitted to it before 8 November. Nebraska huskers preferred to enter by mail, and no counties held contests in either 1924 or 1925. In 1925, McKelvie increased the number of huskers allowed in the state contest to ten, and he continued to urge township Farm Bureaus and community clubs to hold contests. The Nebraska Farmer announced it would support local contests with directions, rules, and printed record blanks, but still no community groups offered to organize a county contest.[28]

In 1926, McKelvie, like the other farm journal editors, announced that only county contest winners would be allowed to compete in the state contest. This announcement forced huskers to arrange local contests. In

many cases, they looked first to their farm bureau as a contest sponsor or host. In 1926, fifteen counties sent their champion husker to the state contest. The following year, McKelvie allowed all county champions to enter the state contest, resulting in thirty contestants. Nebraska selected state contest winners under this system for the remainder of the contest period.[29]

The Missouri Ruralist also began its contests with write-in forms. For its first contest in 1926, the journal solicited write-in entries, pledging that it would consider all huskers. Corn husking editor George Jordan did not expect a large response from farmers, and therefore he did not think that county contests would be necessary. Jordan encouraged everyone, even women, to enter, but he cautioned slower huskers that competition would be strong. He advised contestants unable to shuck a minimum of twenty bushels of corn in eighty minutes not to enter, as they would probably make a poor showing and certainly would not finish very high on the winner's list. No one would be kept out, promised Jordan, but slower pickers could expect to be outclassed.[30]

As the entries came into the Missouri Ruralist's offices, Jordan was surprised at the number: some sixty huskers from twenty-eight counties returned the mail-in form. The size of the contest field posed a potential problem; the twenty-acre contest field had already been selected and its location had been publicized in several newspapers. Jordan considered that changing the location would create too much confusion, so he decided to hold four elimination heats, of fifteen huskers each, in the morning before the start of the state contest. The twenty-acre field was carefully laid out to make the best use of the corn. Thus began what was arguably the longest day of corn husking contests ever held in the Midwest. The contests started at nine o'clock in the morning and continued until the last ear of corn hit the bangboard at dusk.[31]

Jordan and the Missouri Ruralist readily adopted the county contest elimination system for the 1927 state contest. Unlike the other journals,

Jordan allowed the top two huskers from a county to advance to the state contest, thus elimination matches were still needed to reduce the number of contestants in the state contest. Through 1929, Jordan held elimination contests in the morning before the state contest. In 1930, the Missouri Ruralist limited state contest entry to only one husker per county, relying on records made at county contests to identify those contestants. Under this new system, elimination contests were discontinued at the state meet, and all the county champions now competed in one big contest. In 1937, twenty-seven Missouri counties held contests and sent their champions to the state meet.[32]

In 1927, the Kansas Farmer joined the national corn husking contests association. For its first state contest, the journal allowed huskers to enter through a combination of mail-in registration and county contests, with the journal making the final decision of which huskers to invite to the state contest. Corn husking editor O. C. Thompson instructed huskers to fill out the published entry blank, return it to the journal, and then call on county agricultural agents, presidents of county farm organizations, editors of county paper, commercial clubs, and Rotary or Kiwanis clubs, and convince them to stage a county contest. The journal would provide copies of the Standard Farm Paper contest rules and other guidance as necessary. Local groups in fifteen Kansas counties agreed to hold contests, and they sent their champion huskers to the state contest. From 1929 until 1941, thirty to forty corn-growing Kansas counties regularly sent huskers to the state meet. Unlike Iowa and Missouri, Kansas never held district or elimination contests. In 1930, the year the Kansas Farmer hosted the national contest, a record forty-eight Kansas counties sent huskers to the state contest.[33]

The Prairie Farmer, unlike the other farm papers, never used the mail-in entry method. Instead, editor Clifford Gregory organized his journal's contests through the state's farm bureau organization, the Illinois Agricultural Association. Gregory, an advocate of cooperative marketing,

was an early supporter of the formation of a national Farm Bureau, having attended both the initial organizational meeting at New York in February 1919 and the capstone American Farm Bureau Federation organizational meeting in Chicago later that year. He helped arrange for the Illinois Agricultural Association (IAA) to sponsor the early Illinois corn husking contests.[34]

Gregory, with his own involvement in the farm bureau organization, turned to the network of men that he was most familiar with to organize the contests. Beginning in 1924, the county agents, called farm advisors in Illinois, submitted the names of county contest winners, along with their score, to the Prairie Farmer. Gregory and Floyd Akers, his corn husking editor, then chose the top ten to fifteen huskers for the state contest. This entry process continued in Illinois through the entire contest period. Most counties either limited entry to the first ten or so contestants, or held a preliminary contest before the county contest to narrow the field.[35]

Gregory believed the contests possessed the potential for building community support for industrial and scientific agriculture, and he was able to interest the IAA in the corn husking contests as a strategy to promote better farming. Members of the Illinois farm bureaus who were active in organizing the early contests tended to be involved in progressive agriculture. For example, the Stark County Farm Bureau hosted the state contest in 1926, and its president, O. L. Hatch, had boosted progressive agriculture most of his adult life. He was one of the first farmers in Stark county to plant alfalfa and to use limestone fertilizer. Hatch had supported the Farmers' Institutes of the early twentieth century, and had been active in establishing the Henry County Experimental Farm, and he was active in the Kewanee Farm Bureau Community Club.[36]

By the late 1920s, the farm journals had settled on the county contest system as the most efficient for accommodating the majority of the huskers who wanted to participate in state and national contests. The state

journals controlled contest entry, but that responsibility they partially delegated to town and county organizations.

The farm journals controlled, shaped, and supervised the contests through more than just contest entry. Even though the contests were typically held at the same time that fall political campaigns were underway, politics as such were excluded from the contests. The farm journal editors, however, regularly invited high-ranking officeholders to the contests to provide an official seal of approval for the activity. Beginning in the late-1920s, the farm journals regularly invited governors, senators, state secretaries of agriculture, and other such officials to the contests as honored guests, and inviting them to make a short speech, ride in the parade, and perform a ceremonial task, such as starting the contest. In 1926, in one of the first appearances by an elected official at the contests, Nebraska Governor Adam McMullen and Samuel R. McKelvie, former governor and publisher of the Nebraska Farmer, addressed the crowd at the national contest near Fremont. At the 1929 national in Missouri, the state's lieutenant governor and secretary of state attended. The editor of the local newspaper chastised Missouri Governor Caufield for his absence, wondering aloud if the governor really had concern for the farming interests of his state. In Iowa in 1931, Governor Dan Turner delivered the welcoming speech to the assembled crowd at the national contest. Accompanying Governor Turner were Iowa Secretary of State C. C. Greenwalt, the president of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mark Thornburg, and U. S. Congressman T. B. Robinson. Thornburg and Robinson participated in the contest as official timers.[37]

At national and state contests, farm journals awarded prizes to contest winners. The prizes for the national contest remained unchanged from 1924 to 1941, even during the lean years of the Depression; the Standard Farm Paper Association divided two hundred dollars between the top five place holders. One hundred dollars went to the national champion,

and another one hundred dollars was divided proportionately among the next four place holders as follows: second place, fifty dollars; third place, twenty-five dollars; fourth place, fifteen dollars; and fifth place, ten dollars. For state contests, all the state journals awarded cash prizes and paid the expenses of the champion to participate in the national contest for that year. The state runner-up was always invited to the national contest, but he had to finance his own trip. There were some differences in the amount of the cash prizes awarded in state contests, and some journals awarded trophies and loving cups to winners.[38]

In Iowa contests, the prizes were practically identical to the prizes awarded at the national contest, probably because Henry A. Wallace had established both contests. The Iowa state champion received one hundred dollars from Wallaces' Farmer and the next four finishers divided another one hundred dollars as described above. Beginning in 1929 and continuing for several years, Iowa's state champion also received the John P. Wallace silver loving cup, in honor of the general manager of Wallaces' Farmer. The winner was allowed to keep the cup for one year. Any husker who won the cup three times would be allowed to retain in permanently, but none ever achieved this distinction. The name of each winner was engraved on the cup.[39]

In 1929, the Missouri Ruralist put up two hundred dollars in cash prizes for its state contest. Winners of the Missouri state contest and county contests also received a trophy cup from the journal. In 1931 and 1938, the Ohio Farmer offered one hundred fifty dollars in cash divided into seven purses. The champion of both the standing corn contest and the shock husking contest took home a silver trophy. In Kansas, the state champion received one hundred dollars and a silver trophy from Arthur Capper. Prizes for the Pennsylvania contest were less generous than in other states, but all the huskers received at least five dollars and the winner received twenty-five dollars.[40]

Henry A. Wallace, for one, felt that the prize money was an investment toward improving husking speed and methods. Wallace encouraged local bankers and merchants to put up prize money for county contests. Wallace wanted to reward huskers for their contribution to improving husking methods and encouraging faster husking, and the prize money gave huskers a tangible incentive to enter the contests.[41]

Farm journals set the contest dates. By the late 1920s, the entire contest schedule was worked backwards from the date set for the national, as each farm journal scheduled their state contests to be held prior to the national contest. County groups, usually farm bureau committees, then set dates for county contests, allowing enough time for the results to be evaluated by the sponsoring farm journal, if necessary. The entire contest season usually fell within a three week period. Other than Wallace's first contest in December 1922, the latest date that a contest was held was 24 November 1924, at the Midwest contest. Over the next decade, the contests were held progressively sooner as early maturing hybrid corn made earlier contests possible.[42]

The earliest date on which a national contest was held was 30 October 1940. According to Arthur T. Thompson, who succeeded Drips as the corn husking editor for Wallaces' Farmer in the late-1930s, contest planners agreed to avoid the week of the presidential elections, but the week prior seemed too early, especially considering that all the county and state contests would be required to start in mid-October if that date was chosen. While new hybrid corn strains were maturing in midwestern fields more uniformly and earlier than ever before, the timeliness of spring planting, favorable growing weather, and normal frosts could make the late October date too large of a risk. The week following the national elections was also considered, but when planners consulted a weather forecaster, he predicted a large chance for a major snowstorm during that time. Thompson and others then decided to risk the earlier date. In retrospect, their decision proved sound because a blizzard struck the

national contest site near Davenport area 11 November and knocked down NBC's radio broadcasting booth-tower still standing at the contest site.[43]

The farm journals arranged what they considered appropriate entertainment for the contests, often games and other contests which required no special skills and reflected typical farm activities. In 1926, the Missouri Ruralist held a chicken-calling contest for women and a hog-calling contest for men at its state contest. In 1937, the Kansas state contest offered visitors at chance to compete in hog-calling, pole climbing, wife-calling, jig-dancing, and clown contests. For the 1939 Kansas state contest, husband-calling, pie-eating, and womens' nail-driving contests were added. Many of the "fun" contests were designed to entertain women whom, sponsors assumed, might not be as interested in corn husking as their husbands. In 1930, women attending the national contest in Kansas were invited to guess the number of grains of corn a turkey starved for a day would eat in five minutes. Organizers awarded the turkey to the woman making the closest guess and paid cash prizes for other close guesses. In another contest, women were to guess the number of kernels on nine ears of corn. Prizes in both contests ranged from two to five dollars.[44]

Farm journals made sure that state and national contests began and ended on time. At the early contests, an official fired a shotgun to signal the time. Four signals were used: a warning to prepare to start, the starting signal, a warning to prepare to stop, and the signal to stop. The warnings were sounded about one minute before the signal to start or stop. Sometimes, the shotgun shells jammed and the gun did not go off at the proper moment, other times, the two shots led to confusion when some huskers heard only one signal and did not know whether it was the warning or the actual signal. As the contests grew larger, the starting signal became increasingly loud and elaborate so that huskers would be able to hear the signal above the crowd noise. At the 1929 national contest in Missouri, soldiers from Fort Leavenworth fired a one pound cannon to both

start and end the contest. The 1932 national contest at Galva, Illinois, was signalled to begin by the explosion of an aerial bomb. In 1934, sponsors used a stick of dynamite to start the contest. An aerial flash bomb started and stopped the 1935 national contest. In 1936, the warning bomb was a burst in the pattern of the American flag, followed two minutes later by the starting bomb. The 1937 national contest was to have been started by President Roosevelt from Washington, D. C., who was to press a telegraph key which would close an electrical circuit and ignite a bomb on the Weber Brothers farm. The president, however, delegated the job to Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace. Wallace pressed the electric button in New York City and set off the bomb in Missouri. Coincidently, rain began to fall almost at the same instant the bomb exploded.[45]

Other groups and individuals participated in the contests for the common purpose of stimulating agricultural production through scientific methods and efficient management. Among these were contest hosts -- farmers willing to open their farms to hundreds and thousands of visitors in spite of the work of preparing their farm and the risks associated with having so many visitors. Host farmers tended to be involved in commercial agriculture and its producer organizations, be committed to efficiency and modern methods, and to have participated in corn yield tests, soil improvement programs, and livestock breeding programs. Host farmers often belonged to associational and institutional groups that helped disseminate the findings of agricultural station scientists. Some had developed their relationships within these groups while attending midwestern land-grant colleges. Many former students remained in contact with their college professors, who also worked at the experiment stations and kept their former pupils informed of new discoveries. Virtually every state had similar crop improvement associations. Two such associations were the Ohio Seed Improvement Association, established in 1907, and the Wisconsin Crop Experiment Association, also formed in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Ohio Seed Improvement Association was the inspection agency

for certification of farm crop seeds in Ohio. The association was organized by a group of seed producers and others interested in the production of high quality seed; the associations' main objective was "to make the growing of farm crops more profitable by encouraging the use of the best seed of well-adapted varieties."[46]

Farmers in these associations often carried out station experiment's on their own farms through the assistance of county agents. Such an arrangement was attractive to experiment station scientists who had only a limited access to farm fields and lacked the equipment and time to do all the necessary work themselves. In this sense then, private farmers carried out public experiments and assumed at least some of the financial costs of conducting the experiments. In 1929, farm owner Paul Renz hosted the national contest on his farm near Platte City, Missouri. Renz was president of the Missouri Corn Growers Association and had won numerous county yield contests. In addition to corn farming, Renz sold seed corn, raised hogs, and finished steers for market. The host of the 1930 national contest, F. W. Palmer, served as president of the Norton County Farm Bureau. Ira Marshall, host of the 1930 Ohio state corn husking contest, had the reputation of being a champion corn grower because he was one of a handful of Ohio farmers who had produced one hundred bushels or more per acre in a Ten-Acre Yield Contest. Marshall considered farming to be a business and stressed the necessity of conducting it on a money-making basis by using an accurate accounting system. In 1931, contest host Clyde Wilhelm opened his well-maintained Grundy County farm for the national contest. Even through Wilhelm reportedly sustained some fence damage and lost about a load of corn to the thousands of people who pocketed an ear for a souvenir.[47]

In some cases, husking contests were held on rented farms and hosted by farm managers. These farms were typically considered to be among an area's most prosperous, often having been managed by the same tenant for several years. The 1925 Illinois state contest was held on a farm rented

by William Bergman who, as host of the contest, "virtually turned over the farm to the visitors for the entire day." The 1926 national contest was held in a field prepared by farm manager George Moyer. Owner Joseph Roberts, who had served twenty years on the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, rented the farm to Moyer. The 1928 national contest field in Indiana was also farmed by a renter-manager. The 1931 Ohio state contest was held on the thirteen hundred acre Miami Conservancy Farm operated by Harry Booher. Booher had four hundred acres in corn, estimated to yield fifty to sixty bushels to the acre in 1931.[48]

Some hosts combined a corn husking contest with other field demonstrations. During the early 1920s, Willis and Merle Morgan had begun to hold public demonstrations to show the results of the scientific methods in use on their farm, near Galva in Henry County. In 1924, a soil improvement experiment was central to their demonstration. The Morgans had improved half of a run-down field with lime applications and a three-crop rotation system based on corn, oats, and sweet clover. The unimproved half of the field had been continuously cropped to corn. On the improved side of the field, corn output had risen from thirty-five bushels per acre in 1907 to seventy-seven bushels per acre in 1920. This experiment clearly showed visitors the benefits of fertilizing with lime and fixing nitrogen with clover. Through their field demonstrations, the Morgan brothers hoped to encourage their neighbors to adopt similar methods to improve their own productive ability. In 1928, the Morgan Brothers offered to hold the Illinois state corn husking contest on their farm in conjunction with their own annual field day. The Prairie Farmer accepted their offer, but the contest day proved to be a disappointment for the promoters because of extremely wet weather. First, the contest had to be postponed for one day, and then the poor weather kept attendance at only six thousand people, compared with ten thousand people at the state contest the year before.[49]

Some farmers repeatedly hosted contests. James E. Armstrong, farmer in Stark county, Illinois, for example, hosted the 1926 state contest as well

as the 1928 county contest. Ben Stalp, of Cuming County, Nebraska, volunteered his farm for the 1929 state contest and the 1933 national contest. Stalp was involved in corn variety testing in 1933, and he had planted thirty-eight varieties of corn for contest visitors to examine. Stalp worked under the direction of the county agent and in cooperation with the Nebraska College of Agriculture to show the adaptability of the corn to the Nebraska climate. John Shaw, in Washington County, Kansas, hosted the 1939, 1940, and 1941 county husking contests, two of which were held in the same field. In 1939, Shaw hosted the combined Washington County corn husking contest and Farm Bureau/Extension Service annual variety seed corn show. Shaw's farm was selected because of the preparation that had already gone into the annual seed corn show. In late April, Shaw had planted forty-three different varieties of corn in plots four rows wide and forty rods long. Fourteen hybrid varieties were included in the test from commercial producers in Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, and Missouri, along with a group of open-pollinated certified seeds, and twenty-four open pollinated local varieties. The corn variety used in the county contest yielded sixty bushels to the acre. Following the husking contest, a crop specialist from Kansas State College discussed the corn variety tests for an hour or so in the field adjoining the contest field.[50]

Commercial seed corn producers also hosted husking contests in order to show the field performance of their varieties to potential customers. The Morgan brothers used this opportunity several times during the 1920s. In 1924, they compared the disease resistance of treated and untreated strains of Farm Bureau and Krug seed corn. The Morgan brothers' demonstrations attracted the interest of farm leaders and agricultural scientists across the Midwest. In both 1926 and 1927, Henry A. Wallace spoke at their annual corn show; Wallace had some of his own hybrids in the field trials in 1927. In the late 1930s in Woodford County, Illinois, Lester Pfister hosted county contests and provided the seed corn for them.

In 1940, when the county contest was held in a field of his seed corn, Pfister paid each contestant five dollars for their eighty minutes of work, separate from the contest prizes. In 1941, the Pfister farm was the headquarters for the Woodford County husking contest. At the same time, the farm also sponsored its third annual Midwest Corn Carnival, which included demonstration on seed corn, processing of seed, new methods of picking and combining corn.[51]

The involvement of agricultural colleges in the corn husking contests varied from state to state depending on factors such as the personal relationships between a farm journal editor and college faculty members, the interest in the contests among extension scientists, and the friendships between journal editors and county agents. At one extreme of college involvement, Ohio State University, rather than a farm journal, originated corn husking contests in that state. At the other extreme, the University of Missouri at Columbia played only a minor role, leaving that states' contests to the Missouri Ruralist and the Missouri Corn Growers Association. In the other states, most notably in Iowa, the agricultural colleges participated mainly through personal relations with farm journal editors.[52]

College professors of agriculture and extension personnel preached the gospel of efficient farming at the contests. In 1925, the earliest instance of agricultural experts addressing a corn husking crowd occurred at the interstate meet in Illinois, when the Prairie Farmer brought in speakers from the University of Illinois, the United States Department of Agriculture, and Purdue University. During the rest of the 1920s, college professors and scientists spoke more often at state contests than at national contests, but in the 1930s, agricultural professionals began to regularly address national contest crowds.[53]

The agricultural colleges treated the corn husking contests as an opportunity to spread knowledge of new farm technologies through demonstration. When they were involved, the colleges brought a

progressive, educational atmosphere to the contests, showing visitors the latest methods and machinery used in modern farming. During the 1930s, for example, state experiment stations sometimes supplied the hybrid seed corn planted in many state and national contest fields.

At almost every state and national contest, extension personnel and professors of agriculture officiated, judged, refereed, and kept score. Many officials were needed to hold a contest, including a weighmaster, a timekeeper, an official starter, two or three husk counters, a gleaner referees, and several scorers. In 1925 in Illinois, three scientists from the University of Illinois served on the judges committee. In 1931, an Iowa State experiment station technician was the weighmaster and two Iowa State College professors were gleaner referees. At this same contest, two USDA officials calculated the husk deductions, and the corn husking editors from the Farm Paper Unit were judges. At the 1933 national contest in Nebraska, judges included the director of agricultural extension, the head of the department of agronomy and another professor from the Nebraska Agricultural College, and the former secretary of the Nebraska state fair. At the 1939 Illinois contest, the Dean of the College of Agriculture, H. P. Rusk was the official starter. Some judges and officials became regulars at the contests. Two such men were Harold D. Hughes, farm crops professor from Iowa State College and L. C. Burnett of the Iowa Experiment station. Hughes and Burnett assisted at practically every Iowa contest held during the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, W. C. Coffey, dean and director of the Minnesota College of Agriculture and Experiment Station, St. Paul, and R. F. Hodgson, superintendent of the Waseca Experiment Station, had both judged in six out of ten Minnesota state contests by 1934.[54]

During the late-1930s, state extension services and colleges of agriculture grew increasingly involved in the contests, especially after the contests expanded to three and four days. These groups used the contests to display and demonstrate a variety of projects and production

test results. This required pre-planning and coordination in the early spring for several events were often scheduled to be held on the same farm.

Ohio, more than any other state, tended to combine the corn husking contests with annual agricultural college field days, beginning in 1930 with the first Ohio Corn Harvest Field Day. Specialists from Ohio State and the Extension service planned the Field Day to educate visitors on scientific farming methods. Visitors at that event could attend a discussion by contest host and Master Farmer Ira Marshall on his corn-growing methods, an explanation by extension crops specialists about the Ten-Acre Corn Project, talks by specialists from the department of agricultural engineering regarding corn harvesting machinery, a comparison by a rural economics professor on the costs of various corn harvesting methods, and a lecture by the department head of animal husbandry at the Ohio Experiment Station explaining the value of corn stover in the 1930-1931 Feeding Program.[55]

Unlike contests held elsewhere in the Midwest, most of the details and management of the Ohio event, as well as most of the preliminary work and arrangements, were in the hands of the agricultural extension supervisor and the extension crop specialist. The Ohio Farmer was included in the planning of the husking contests, but the journal had to hold the contests within the context set by the extension service. The 1930 Ohio husking contest followed slightly different rules than those adopted by the Standard Farm Papers, consequently, Ohio state contest winners were ineligible to advance to the national contest. The corn husking contest proved to be the most popular activity of the day, and Walter Lloyd, general editor of the Ohio Farmer, seeing visitor's positive reaction to the contest, pledged that the journal would sponsor the contest the following year. The extension department promised Lloyd its support.[56]

In 1931, the Ohio Farmer encouraged county contests as the first step toward the state contest. The journal required that all county contests be

conducted under the Farm Paper Unit rules used in other states and in the national contests. This stipulation was necessary if county and state winners were to advance to the national contest. The journal welcomed county winners from either standing or shock corn contests, or both, but only those who husked from standing corn were allowed at the national contest. Eighteen of Ohio's eighty-eight counties held corn husking contests that year, and the best huskers from twelve counties advanced to the state contest.[57]

The 1931 contest was again held as part of the Corn Harvest Field Day, and Ohio extension agents and college personnel again played a central role. Specialists in farm management, crops, soils and fertility, hybrid corn breeding, and the Ten-Acre contests demonstrated the latest methods in their areas. Henry A. Wallace addressed the crowd, stressing the need for cooperation in meeting the economic situation in agriculture. As in the previous year, the general program for the Corn Harvest Field Day was planned and conducted by university extension personnel. Most contest workers were county extension agents. Ray T. Kelsy, corn husking editor of the Ohio Farmer, however, found it necessary to turn to local civic groups from Miami County, Tippecanoe City, and Troy to help with some of the contest arrangements such as driving wagons, gleaning behind the huskers, directing parking, and selling food to visitors.[58]

In assessing the outcome of the 1931 Harvest Field Day, sponsors agreed that the demonstrations on corn harvesting machinery, farm management and crops and soils were informative and generally well attended, but the corn husking contest attracted the most attention and interest. Approximately fifteen thousand people came to visit Ohio's second annual Corn Harvest Field Day. The following year, 1932, the Ohio state corn husking contest was again held in conjunction with the Annual Corn Harvest Field Day, but relied even more heavily on local support than previously. Cooperation came from the Licking County agent, the Agrarian Club, the Grange, the Farm Bureau, the Newark Kiwanis Club, and the Hebron

Polo Club. The following year, 1933, Ohio extension officials turned even more to community groups to help conduct the state corn husking contest. The Huron County farmers' committee offered the best arrangements to the extension service by mid-August and so that county was selected as the site for the state contest. The Ohio contests clearly showed the need for decentralized authority in the federated contest system. Ohio's contests were planned by state groups, but depended on grass-roots cooperation from town organizations in order to carry out the many details. The pivotal person who helped bridge this gap between state and local levels was the county extension agent.[59]

At the local level, corn husking contests were mainly directed by county extension agents. The agent was the most visible grassroots force for progressive agriculture in the Midwest during this period. Congress had institutionalized the county agent system with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. By the mid-1920s, county agents had been hired in most states. Essentially, agents were facilitators who mediated the relations between the university-based extension service, the land-grant college, and the farmer. They helped groups of county farmers conduct extension-devised experiments, projects, and contests.

Although other activities and projects received greater amounts of an agent's time and attention than the annual county corn husking contest, none generated the same level of community involvement and publicity for scientific, industrial-type agriculture. Of the three contest levels, extension agents had the most direct influence over the county contest, and much less over state and national contests, even when they were held in his county. In county contests, the agent's job was three-fold. First, he had to ensure that the rules set by the farm journals were strictly followed. Second, he had to encourage local farmers to join work committees and to solicit prizes from local businessmen. Third, he had to recruit contestants. Recruitment was usually less of a problem than finding a fair way to limit the number of contestants. The county agent

essentially controlled participation in the contests because almost all huskers entered through a committee operating under his direction. Most agents planned local contests following a request from a group of local huskers who thought they had a chance to win a state contest. Other times, an agent simply announced a contest and waited to see if interest existed in the county.

One of the most active county agents involved in the corn husking contests was Lou Plager from Grundy County, Iowa. Plager was arguably one of the most well-connected men to ever hold the county agent's position. Plager began practicing progressive agriculture on his farm in Grundy County after graduating from Iowa State College in 1909. Plager, a cattle breeder, was known by his neighbors as a practical farmer. In 1918, he was elected as the first president of the Grundy County Farm Bureau, and from 1927 to 1930, Plager directed county extension work. As county agent, Plager spent considerable time and energy coaching county 4-H teams. He helped to organize baby beef clubs, sow and litter clubs, grain and stock judging teams. He took his 4-H teams to county, district, and state fairs, as well as to the International competition almost every year beginning in 1917. The editor of the Grundy Register praised Plager as "one of the 4-H Club pioneers in Iowa and a leader in his county, probably coaching more winning 4-H Club teams than any other man in Iowa."[60]

Plager encouraged competitive activity as a means to improve agriculture. He avidly participated in livestock improvement through judging contests, which rewarded farmers who had followed advice in breeding and feeding from state extension services. Two years in a row, 1932 and 1933, Plager placed first in the state livestock judging contest. He presided over the Iowa Livestock Judges Association in 1933, the same year he was awarded the highest score ever given up to that time in a livestock judging contest, beating eighty other livestock judges from all parts of Iowa. Plager's organizational ability and personal connections within agricultural circles was recognized when Secretary of Agriculture

Wallace appointed him Chief of Forage Conservation under the provisions of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. In this position, Plager purchased millions of tons of feed and shipped it to cattle farmers in drought areas in nine midwestern states.[61]

Plager was Iowa's first county agent to promote the corn husking contests. In 1922, Plager urged Ben Grimmius Jr., a young farmer from Grundy County, to enter Wallace's first contest. During the 1920s, Grimmius' name became familiar to Iowans as a regular in state corn husking contests. Plager's connections with farm leaders, stock breeders, and editors of farm papers in the Midwest played a major role in bringing the 1931 National Corn Husking Contest to Grundy County. After the Forage Conservation Program ended, Plager returned to his position as Grundy county agent and continued organizing county corn husking contests until 1941.[62]

The corn husking contests were significant parts of extension work because they showed the cooperative working relationships between farmers, merchants, and extension agents in an extremely positive light. When Harold Shull became the extension agent in Washington county, Kansas, one of his first jobs was to conduct the 1939 county corn husking contest, which he did well enough to "prove his ability to promote agricultural activities." In some counties, then, the ability to organize and hold corn husking contests showed the farming community an agent's commitment to serving their interests.[63]

The dependence of the corn husking contests on the organizational efforts of the county agent became evident in South Dakota after some counties stopped funding a county agent. Counties held this power because when South Dakota passed enabling legislation for the Smith-Lever Act in January 1915, the law included a provision which gave counties the power to change their extension appropriations through a local referendum. A petition with one hundred signatures could put the issue of funding a county's agent on the ballot during a general election. Several South

Dakota counties used the provision to remove their county agents after World War I, when federal emergency funds to support county agents expired. Of South Dakota's sixty-five counties, only twenty-seven continued to fund agents in 1931. In 1935, a new state extension law repealed the referendum power of county voters. Under the new law, approval of county extension funding was transferred to a board of county commissioners. In actuality, the state law merely recognized the existence of a new situation. By the mid-1930s, many South Dakota county boards of supervisors had circumvented voters' wishes by hiring temporary agents with federal funds under the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. By the end of 1935, fifty South Dakota counties had hired permanent county agents.[64]

In 1932, residents in Lake County, South Dakota, had voted to discontinue extension funding. Without the organizing influence of a county agent, the corn husking contests ceased. In 1935, under the new state law, the county board of supervisors hired C. A. Hicks as its agent. As one of his first projects, Hicks organized a county corn husking contest and publicized it in the local newspaper. The contest attracted about one thousand spectators. Eight huskers entered the competition, and forty-five men volunteered as gleaners, drivers, weighmasters, statisticians, field marshalls and fire marshals. W. H. Kircher, corn husking editor of the Farmer, judged the contest.[65]

Not content with holding just the county contest, Hicks and the Madison Chamber of Commerce arranged for Lake County to also host the South Dakota state corn husking contest that year. The Chamber believed, rightly as it turned out, that the county stood a good chance to be selected by the Farmer for the contest, in part because it offered a centrally located field on a good highway. The state contest attracted twenty huskers and some ten thousand visitors. Interested persons unable to attend in person could follow the radio broadcast of the event on station KSOO from Sioux Falls. Richard Anderson of Minnehaha County,

former state champion, won the contest and became eligible to enter the national at Indiana.[66]

Hicks directed the contest and described it, with no little pride, as "the greatest event ever to be held in Lake County." Kircher, similarly enthusiastic, said that no state contest of this kind ever conducted in the Northwest had aroused more enthusiasm or proved more successful than the one held in Lake County. To show their appreciation for the hard work of community volunteers, the Madison Chamber of Commerce entertained approximately one hundred twenty-five contest volunteers with a program at the city hall.[67]

Holding a contest offered an important way for county agents to reach out to farmers, and to show their interest in rural recreation as well as in work. Organizing and holding a corn husking contest publicly demonstrated the skills of a county agent and his community-boosting ability. The need to cooperate with the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups in putting on a contest showed how well an agent could coordinate various elements of the business community in the service of agriculture. The fact that the corn husking contests were suspended when Lake County had no extension agent illustrates the central role the agent played as facilitator. Without an agent neither the Madison Chamber of Commerce or the farmers themselves were willing to arrange the contests, even though they possessed the essential means.

The farm journals provided the framework, the rules, the direction, and the common purpose for all of these various groups to find a place through which to participate in the corn husking contests. The 1940 national contest demonstrates how the contests brought together various agricultural interests for a common purpose. A special, honorary advisory committee was formed for the 1940 national contest, boasting seventeen prominent members, representing government, educational institutions, and farm groups. Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace headed the committee. Iowa government officials included Governor George A. Wilson,

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mark Thornburg, the Iowa commissioner of public safety, and the chief engineer of the state highway commission. Representing the interests of Iowa State College were President Charles E. Friley, Dean of Agriculture H. H. Kildee, Director of Extension Ralph K. Bliss, and Experiment Station Director R. E. Buchanan. Lou Plager served on the committee in his role as president of the Iowa County Agents' Association. Farm groups represented on the committee included the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Farmers' Union, and the Iowa State Grange. Commodity groups were represented by the Iowa Corn and Small Grain Growers Association and the Iowa Farmer Grain Dealers' Association. These groups and individuals cooperated through the corn husking contest structure to give public support to improving production methods for industrial-type agriculture.[68]

Notes

1. Farmer, 16 October 1926, 7; Homer E. Socolofsky, "The *Capper Farm Press* Experience in Western Agricultural Journalism," Journal of the West 19, no. 2 (April 1980): 22-29.

2. James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer* and WLS: The Burridge D. Butler Years (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 90-91.

3. Farmer, 16 October 1926, 7.

4. Ohio Farmer, 26 September 1925, 25; Evans, *Prairie Farmer* and WLS, 80-1, 89; Wallaces' Farmer, 26 October 1929, 3; Socolofsky, "The *Capper Farm Press* Experience," 22.

5. Socolofsky, "The *Capper Farm Press* Experience, 26; Evans, *Prairie Farmer* and WLS, 88.

6. Missouri Ruralist, 1 October 1929, 3.

7. [Minnesota] Farmer, 16 October 1926, 7; Evans, Prairie Farmer and WLS, 91.

8. Martin L. Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests and Related Later Programs (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1962), 190; Students'

Directory: Iowa State College, Fall 1906 (Ames: Iowa State College, 1906); Catalogue: Iowa State College (Ames: Iowa State College, 1910); Socolofsky, "The *Capper Farm Press* Experience," 60; Henry A. Wallace and William L. Brown, Corn and Its Early Fathers (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1956, rev. 1988), 114-15. The circle of acquaintances and colleagues that Henry A. Wallace developed at Iowa State College included people known by his teachers. For example, Harold D. Hughes had previously taught at the University of Missouri, where one of his students had been Frederick D. Richey, who, in 1922, became the principal agronomist in charge of corn investigations for the Department of Agriculture. Deborah Fitzgerald, in The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890-1940 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), describes the difference of opinion that developed in the early-1920s between Henry A. Wallace and Frederick Richey over federal financial support for local corn yield contests (65-69). Richey wanted to limit federal funds for local contests while Wallace believed that discoveries made by farmers could be as useful as those made by scientists.

9. Wallaces' Farmer, 27 October 1922, 4; 21 September 1923, 3; 20 November 1925, 7; 24 September 1926, 3.

10. Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; 12 September 1924, 3; 25 September 1925, 3; 20 November 1925, 7.

11. Wallaces' Farmer, 24 September 1926, 3; 12 November 1926, 9.

12. Des Moines Register, 28 October 1928, 7-X; West Branch Times, 17 October 1929; [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 20 October 1927.

13. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 26 February 1938, 16; Wallaces' Farmer, 23 October 1925, 5; 24 September 1926, 3-4.

14. Wallaces' Farmer, 24 September 1926, 3; [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 18 November 1926.

15. Nebraska Farmer, 1 October 1927, 7.

16. Farmer, 20 October 1928, 7.

17. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 15 November 1930, 3.

18. For further instances where several fields were prepared for state and national contests, see Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 13 October 1934, 15; 26 February 1938, 8.

19. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 18 November 1926; C. S. "Grundy County, 1926," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: Iowa, Cooperative Extension Service (Ames: Iowa State University, 1913-1968), 18-20, Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: Iowa.

20. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 1 October 1928.

21. Wallaces' Farmer, 18 November 1927, 8; 26 November 1927, 3. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 10 November 1927; Gowrie News, 10 November 1927; Fort Dodge Messenger, 11 November 1927, 1.

22. Grundy [Center, Iowa] Register, 8 November 1928; Wallaces' Farmer, 9 November 1928, 3.

23. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 15 October 1932, 7; 26 November 1932, 9; 11 November 1933, 8.

24. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 22 October 1938, 7; 5 November 1938, 5; 2 November 1940, 9.

25. Farmer, 2 October 1926, 8; 13 November 1926, 8.

26. Farmer, 26 September 1925, 1; 9 October 1926, 18; 8 October 1927, 7; 10 November 1928, 5.

27. Farmer, 9 October 1926, 18; Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 19 October 1929, 7; 16 November 1929, 18.

28. Nebraska Farmer, 27 September 1924, 3; 26 September 1925, 7; 10 November 1925, 3.

29. Nebraska Farmer, 2 October 1926, 7; 20 November 1926, 3; 5 November 1927, 3. Leonard J. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the

Bangboards: Complete Digest of Corn Husking Records (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1975), 174-75.

30. Missouri Ruralist, 15 October 1926, 8; [Keytesville] Chariton Courier, 15 October 1926.

31. Missouri Ruralist, 1 December 1926, 3.

32. [Keytesville] Chariton Courier, 18 November 1927; New Franklin News, 8 November 1929. Missouri Ruralist, 1 October 1929, 3; 15 October 1930, 5. [Marshall] Daily Democrat News, 26 October 1937.

33. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 8 October 1927, 3; 7 November 1927, 7; 12 October 1929, 6; 31 October 1931, 1; 9 November 1935, 13; 5 November 1938, 8; 18 October 1941, 1; 11 October 1930, 10.

34. Evans, *Prairie Farmer* and WLS, 129-30.

35. Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1924, 5; 15 November 1924, 5; 7 November 1925, 6; 8 November 1930, 20; 23 November 1935, 21; 4 October 1941, 10. Metamora Herald, 1 November 1935.

36. Stark County News, 15 October 1924.

37. Nebraska Farmer, 20 November 1926, 3; [Platte City] Landmark, 22 November 1929; Grundy [Center] Register, 13 November 1931, Sect. 2, 1.

38. For examples of prize announcements for the national contest, see Wallaces' Farmer, 23 September 1927, 5; 20 September 1929, 3.

39. Wallaces' Farmer, 25 September 1925, 3; 20 September 1927, 3; 4 October 1929, 8.

40. Missouri Ruralist, 1 October 1929, 3. Ohio Farmer, 3 October 1931, 6; 24 September 1938, 3. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 1 November 1930, 3; Pennsylvania Farmer, 11 October 1941, 9.

41. Wallaces' Farmer, 21 September 1923, 3; 7 December 1923, 5.

42. Wallaces' Farmer, 5 December 1924, 9.

43. Arthur T. Thompson, postscript to Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, by Leonard Jacobs, 188-89.

44. Missouri Ruralist, 1 December 1926, 3, 17. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 6 November 1937, 5; 21 October 1939, 2; 14 November 1930, 3.

45. Norton Daily Telegram, 11, 15 November 1930; Prairie Farmer 23 November 1929, 5; Galva News, 10 November 1932; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 7 November 1934; Lafayette Journal and Courier, 7 November 1935; Columbus Dispatch, 8 November 1936, 4-A, 1-B. Kansas City Star, 3 November 1937, 11; 4 November 1937, 1. Ohio Farmer, 20 November 1937, 2.

46. Jack Ralph Kloppenburg Jr., First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 80-81; Ohio Farmer, 23 September 1939, 6.

47. Prairie Farmer, 19 October 1929, 10; Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 1 November 1930, 12; Ohio Farmer, 25 October 1930, 4; Troy Democrat, 22 October 1931; [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 19 November 1931.

48. [Hillsboro] Montgomery News, 11 November 1925. Prairie Farmer, 27 November 1926, 3; 24 November 1928, 3. Ohio Farmer, 14 November 1931, 3.

49. Galva News, 20 November 1924; 29 October 1925; 11 October 1928. [Galesburg] Register Mail, 11 November 1927, 2.

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58. Ohio Farmer, 14 November 1931, 3.

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60. Students' Directory, (Ames: Iowa State College, Fall 1906); Bomb (Ames: Iowa State College, 1908). [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 13 October 1927; 13 November 1931, Section 5, 1; 14 December 1933.

61. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 5 June 1933; 4 July 1935.

62. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 13 November 1931, Section 5, 1.

63. [Washington] Washington County Register, 20 October 1939; 3 November 1939.

64. James Marten, "'A Golden Opportunity'": The South Dakota Extension Service and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, 1933-1935," South Dakota History 12, no. 2, 3 (Summer/Fall 1982): 163-81; Wayne D. Rassmussen, Taking the University to the People: Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 97-100.

65. C. A. Hicks, "Lake County, 1932," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: South Dakota T888 R33 (Washington, D. C.: USDA, 1913-1944), 27, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: South Dakota.

66. Hicks, "Lake County, 1932," County Agents' Reports: South Dakota T888 R33, 27-28, appendix, undated newspaper clipping.

67. Hicks, "Lake County, 1932," County Agents' Reports: South Dakota T888 R33, 1, 28, 30-31.

68. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 9 March 1940, 8.

SHAPING CORN FARMING: PRODUCTION INPUTS

During the era of the husking contests, corn production grew increasingly dependent on mechanization and the application of scientific research. The primary components of this trend were the substitution of tractor power for horse power, the development of a viable mechanical picker-husker for harvesting corn, and the adoption of hybrid seed corn. Changes in corn culture included the geographic expansion of the Corn Belt, especially to the north and the west, the decline of shock husking in the east, and a decline in the labor required for husking. These changes gradually made corn farming increasingly dependent on an emerging farm supply industry. Farmers mechanized their harvest operations in order save their own labor and reduce their production costs, but farmers found that by mechanizing their harvest they increased their need for an annual cash income to purchase gasoline, tires, fertilizer, and seed corn, and thus they integrated their farming operations with an emerging agricultural industry.[1]

As they mechanized, most farmers perceived that they were gaining greater control over the harvest, when in fact those who gained greater control were the implement manufacturers, oil companies, and seed corn producers, those who were advocating the industrialization of corn farming. Farmers who did recognize a loss of some independence nevertheless embraced the new order because in it they saw an opportunity to raise profits. By purchasing and using new machines and technology, farmers implicitly accepted the shift toward greater dependence on agricultural suppliers. The adoption of new types of production equipment and technologies occurred fastest in the cash grain and livestock feeding areas of the Midwest. These were also the sections where the corn husking contests developed in the early 1920s and where local participation in the contests was substantial and sustained.

The Corn Belt of the 1920s and 1930s can be roughly defined as the section of the United States where corn was the most important field crop.

The Corn Belt was not homogenous, however, and variations existed within the region. While corn, hogs, and beef cattle were the major components of Corn Belt farming and most sections of the Corn Belt grew corn mainly for on-the-farm consumption by livestock, some sections produced for off-the-farm export. Similarly, harvest methods varied across the Corn Belt, in large part dependent on the end use of the corn and available technology. These differences influenced the amount of corn acreage per farm, the importance of corn in relation to other crops and livestock, labor requirements, and work arrangements.[2]

Five principal corn-producing sections of the Midwest were identified in 1936 by the National Research Project as follows: 1) the eastern dairy and hog section in western Ohio and northern Indiana, 2) the cash grain section in northeast Illinois and northwest Iowa/southwest Minnesota, 3) the livestock feeding section in northwest Illinois and east-central Iowa, 4) the livestock grazing section of southern Iowa and northern Missouri, and 5) the cattle ranging sections of western Iowa, northeastern Kansas, eastern Nebraska, and extreme southeast South Dakota, see Figure 1. The researchers identified these sections based on reports from farmers in sample counties. Researchers asked farmers about the operations they used to produce corn, the amount of time each operation required, the type of equipment used, and the sources of power.[3]

The survey recognized that the geographical limits of the Corn Belt had expanded during the early twentieth century to include western parts of South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. This expansion resulted from the use of corn varieties developed by state experiment stations which matured under drier conditions. The new areas contributed to a rise in total U.S. corn production. In some western counties, the adaptation of new varieties helped corn become as important as wheat. Western farmers raised corn on a larger, less labor-intensive basis in this so-called small grain section. In new Corn Belt areas, corn helped farmers diversify their production with less wheat and more livestock. The Kansas Farmer reported that

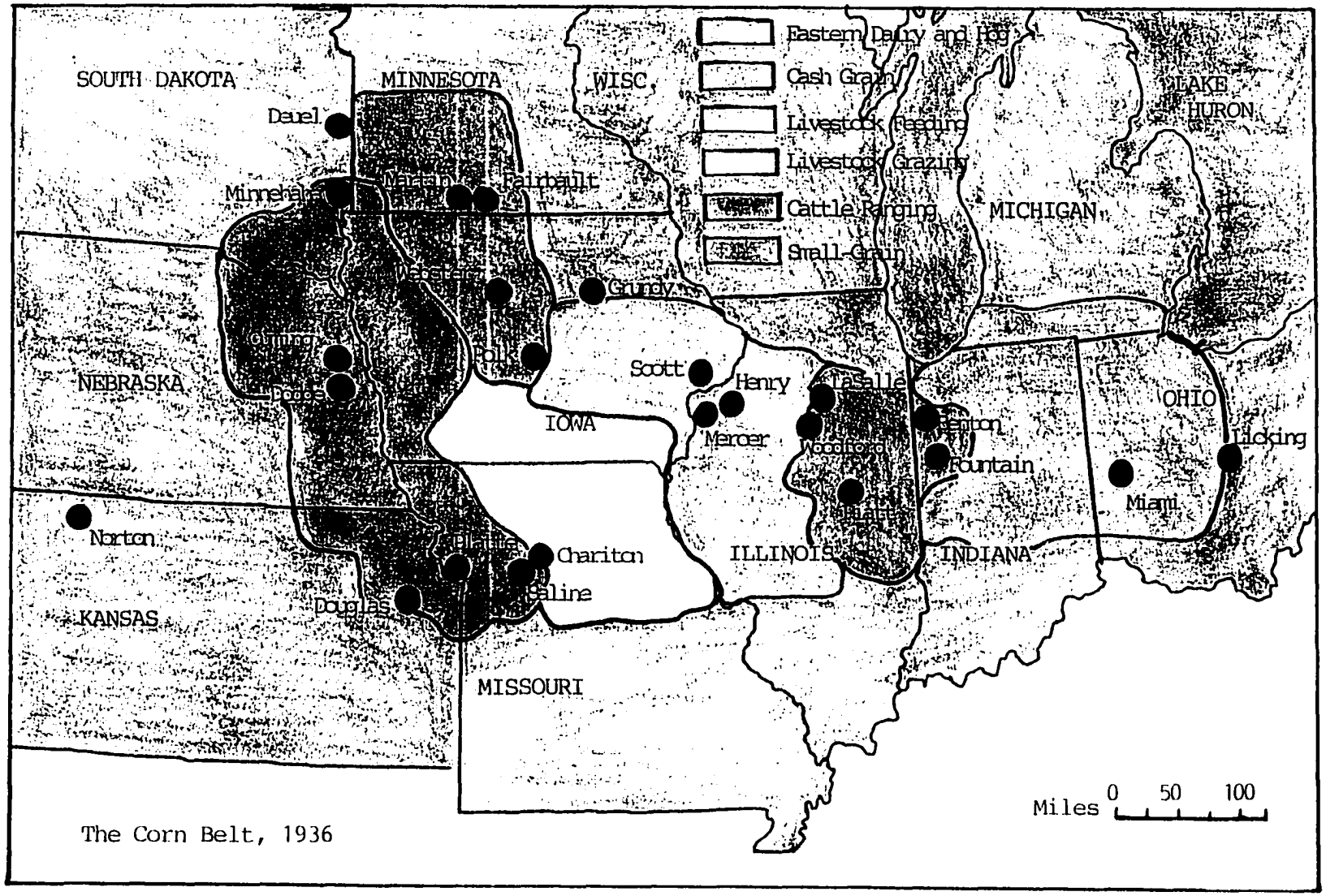

Fig. 1. Midwestern corn farming regions and selected counties involved in the corn husking contests. Map is a modification of maps published in Macy, et. al., "Changes in Technology," National Research Project (Philadelphia, Pa.: Works Progress Administration, 1938), 48, 69.

farmers in the northwestern part of the state, for instance, welcomed the introduction of new crops, better-adapted varieties of familiar crops, and new farming methods, such as listing, and the adoption of mechanical power to both supplement and replace horse and mule power.[4]

Southern Minnesota and Wisconsin likewise became more important corn producing states in the early twentieth century. Year by year, through acclimatization and breeding, the corn area moved steadily west and north so that by 1930, Minnesota ranked fourth among all the Corn Belt states, producing over one hundred million bushels of corn per year. In 1930, a farmer in Murray County, Minnesota, reported that the common sight of a fifty-five acre corn field had been a curiosity in 1899. These new areas participated in the corn husking contest, further demonstrating how the Corn Belt had expanded between 1900 and 1920.[5]

Until the mid-1930s, harvesting remained the single most time consuming task associated with corn growing. The two most widely used methods of harvesting corn were either from shocks or from standing corn. The basic difference was that shocking harvested the entire plant, while husking from standing corn harvested principally the grain. Harvesting corn could either be a complex process involving various combinations of men, machines, and animals, as in shock husking, or a relatively simple process, as in husking from standing corn.[6]

Corn had been harvested in shocks by native Americans, and the method had been adopted by European settlers. It remained popular in areas of relatively limited corn production, such as the eastern Corn Belt. The origin of the practice of husking from standing corn is not known with certainty, but it seems to have developed in the Midwest around the time of the Civil War, where it may have been introduced as a method to expedite the harvest with a reduced labor force. It may also have developed in areas where large amounts of hay were grown to feed to livestock for roughage, thus reducing the need for corn stalks. Another possibility is that it developed in tandem with midwestern farmers'

specialization in hogs, who generally require less fodder than cattle and thrive on a diet rich in corn.

In the Corn Belt, the practice of husking from shocked corn was common mainly in Ohio, and farmers in Pennsylvania, which joined the corn husking contests in 1938, also practiced shock husking. A few Kansas and Nebraska farmers occasionally shocked some of their corn, and farmers in Missouri and southern Illinois likewise may have shocked small amounts of corn to use as cattle feed.

In Ohio, the corn harvest had been almost completely mechanized by 1900, at least three decades before husking from standing corn was mechanized. The only part of the process that remained unmechanized was the removal of the ear from the stalk, the essential step when husking from standing corn. Ohio farmers shocked corn by cutting off the corn plant close to the ground with sled cutters, gathering the stalks into a bundle with a mechanical binder, and standing the bundle on end to dry. Shocked corn could be used several ways. Farmers could feed livestock directly from the shock, or the ears of corn could be husked from the stalks allowing the grain and plant material to be fed separately. Some farmers built their shocks near animal pens and outbuildings, thus making feeding easier and reducing the amount of wasted corn.[7]

The plant material in corn shocks was called fodder and stover. The term fodder referred to the entire plant, including the ears, while stover referred to just the stalks and leaves without the ears. Both fodder and stover could be fed to cattle whole or shredded, but usually only stover was shredded. Harvesting corn as fodder saved a farmer the labor of husking out the ears and was a common method of harvesting grain of inferior quality. Farmers tended to make fodder when the corn crop was to be fed on the farm, but they made stover when the quality of the corn was high enough to be sold as grain, thus warranting the labor of husking.[8]

By 1940, many Pennsylvania farmers had developed an unfavorable opinion of stover because of its low nutritional value, and those with

alternative sources of roughage quit making it. A farmer with plenty of good legume hay for roughage could probably afford to husk his corn from the standing stalk and abandon the stover, especially if the cost of labor was high. Stover was made from the least nutritious parts of the corn plant; although the leaves delivered important nutrients, the corn stalks were practically not worth the digestive effort, and the husks contained the lowest of all digestible protein and nutrients. The ears, by contrast, were about three-quarters digestible protein and two-thirds digestible nutrients. Perhaps the best use for stover was as bedding, where it could soak up barn manure and then be spread on fields as fertilizer.[9]

Husking out the ears from shocked corn was performed by hand; a husker tore open the shock, scattered the stalks on the ground, snapped the ears off, and either threw them into a pile on the ground or into a waiting wagon. The grain was either sold or fed on the farm. The remaining plant material, the stover, was put through a mechanical shredder and then fed to dairy or beef cattle. Shocks typically held stalks from about one hundred forty-four hills of corn. One advantage that husking from shocked corn had over husking from standing corn was that shocking cleared the corn field of plant residue.[10]

Through the 1930s, husking from shocks became less common in the eastern Corn Belt as farmers reduced their reliance on the corn plant for livestock fodder. In 1909, 64 percent of corn acreage in the eastern Corn Belt had been husked from shocks and only 27 percent from standing corn. By 1936, 47 percent of eastern corn acreage was husked from shocked corn and 40 percent from standing corn. In terms of the number of farms, in 1936, 67 percent of eastern Corn Belt farms husked from shocks, 44 percent of farms husked from standing stalks, 13 percent made stover, 13 percent hogged off their corn, and 12 percent harvested their corn as ensilage. These statistics indicate that eastern farmers were using a combination of harvesting methods for their corn. Ohio farmers gradually stopped husking from shocks as the use of mechanical pickers spread, the practice of

husking from standing corn increased, and the awareness of the minimal food value available from the corn stalks and leaves rose.[11]

In part, the decline of shock husking can be attributed to the corn husking contests. Ohio was the only state that held corn husking contests in both standing and shocked corn. In fact, both contests were held on the same day, in the same place, and observers could not help but notice that husking from standing corn was more efficient than husking from shocked corn. L. L. Rummell, writing in the Ohio Farmer, estimated that a husker could harvest 50 to 100 percent more corn from standing corn than from shocked corn in the same amount of time. In the Ohio counties that held contests in both standing and shocked corn, men invariably husked twice as much from the standing corn as from the shocked corn. This, in addition to the availability of ensilers and mechanical pickers, contests helped speed the end of shocking in Ohio.[12]

Ensilage provided a viable alternative to fodder and stover because it dramatically reduced the number of steps required to process the corn plant into food for cattle. The main outward difference between fodder and ensilage was that fodder was dry, and ensilage was moist, and it was more nutritious. In 1934, researchers at the Ohio Experiment Station reported that ensilage's higher nutritional value made it considerably more economical for feeding than shocked corn. The station found that a typical acre of corn had 40 percent greater feeding value when fed as ensilage than when fed as a stover mixed with shelled corn, hay, and cottonseed meal. In addition, ensilage making was favored by farmers who found themselves with immature corn at harvest time, or who were short other forms of roughage for their animals. The ensilage machine chopped the entire corn plant into small pieces while still green so that it would ferment. The plant material was then blown by a fan into a silo through large pipes. After a period of fermentation, ensilage could be fed to cattle along with hay and shelled corn. Compacted in a silo, ensilage took up less space than fodder or stover. Nevertheless, only a small portion of

the annual corn harvest could be put in a silo because of the bulkiness of the product.[13]

The cost of the ensilage machine was relatively high compared with the cost of the labor saved, and many farmers declined to purchase an ensiler. Other farmers found that selling custom ensiling services to their neighbors helped offset the purchase cost and upkeep expenses of the machine. Farmers' use of neighborhood custom ensilage-making services contributed to the spread of the practice, but it did not necessarily increase sales of ensilers.[14]

Farmers in central and western sections of the Midwest preferred to husk from standing corn, but they also made some fodder, stover, and ensilage to compliment their grain harvest. In 1936, in the livestock feeding area of northwestern Illinois and east central Iowa, 98 percent of the farms husked from standing corn, 28 percent also made ensilage, 8 percent made fodder, 12 percent made stover, and 12 percent hogged off their corn. In cash grain region in northeast Illinois and northwest Iowa/southwest Minnesota, 100 percent of the farms husked from standing corn, 6 percent made ensilage, 13 percent made fodder, none produced stover, and 13 percent hogged off. In the cattle ranging western section, 97 percent of the farms husked from standing corn, 9 percent of the farms made ensilage, 7 percent made fodder, no farms produced stover, and 8 percent hogged off part of their corn. Cash grain farmers and livestock feeders were more likely to make ensilage in years when a cool, wet summer kept the corn from reaching maturity before the arrival of a killing frost. Under-matured corn, or green corn, could hold as much as 60 percent moisture when killed by frost. With this amount of moisture, the corn could not be cribbed in the usual way without spoiling.[15]

In the small grain area of South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, husking from standing corn was the most widely used harvest method. About 88 percent of the farms in this region harvested the majority of their corn from standing plants, 25 percent of the farms also made ensilage, and 24

percent of the farms gathered corn as fodder. In years when the price of corn made it an expensive feed, stover made a practical addition to the diet of livestock. In 1933, the Kansas Farmer advised its readers who husked from standing corn to harvest their stover because of the high price of feed grains and the shortage of other forms of roughage, such as hay.[16]

In northwestern Kansas a handful of counties, including Norton, Sherman, and Thomas, counted corn as a major crop along with wheat and cattle. The corn in western Kansas was so good that in 1930 the national corn husking contest was held in Norton County, selected by the Kansas Farmer because the corn in eastern Kansas had been severely damaged by drought and was in poor condition for a national contest. Norton County was the furthest point west ever to host a national corn husking contest. In 1930, 89 percent of Norton County farms raised corn, and of those, 99 percent raised it for grain and husked from standing corn. Although 75 percent of the county farms raised beef, silage-making was not common, as only 8 percent of the farms produced it in 1930. A mere 2 percent of the corn acreage was used for fodder, stover, or hogged off. Apparently, Norton County farmers fed their cattle mostly corn.[17]

Perhaps the easiest harvest method was to turn livestock into the field to forage. This method was most efficient when the corn had been knocked down by wind or rain and would be difficult for either men or machines to recover. Hogs were the most commonly-used animal for harvesting. Hogging off corn had the advantages of saving labor and storage charges. It distributed manure evenly and uniformly, harvested without waste, and made fall plowing easier because the stalks were trampled down. Hogging off had good results on dry ground, but in muddy fields, a considerable amount of corn could be lost underfoot.[18]

In 1927, the Nebraska Farmer advised its readers that hogging off was especially useful for soft, immature corn, which was of approximately equal value to that of regular corn for hog feed, but had lower harvesting

costs if hogged off. The journal noted that the three advantages to hogging off corn was that it eliminated labor problems for the farmer, replenished soil fertility with hog manure, and cleaned up corn otherwise wasted.[19]

In 1929, T. J. Charles wrote in the Ohio Farmer that most Ohio corn was raised for local livestock and, therefore, the problem of saving corn left in the fields was usually solved by letting hogs forage for it. This practice was a popular compliment to hand husking as well as to machine husking. Charles considered hogging off corn to be a worthwhile practice because it was both economical and helped keep the pigs in "thrifty condition," by putting muscle on hogs while they foraged for their dinner.[20]

In 1936, despite the variations in harvesting methods, approximately 85 percent of the total midwestern corn crop was fed to cattle and hogs in one form or another, either as grain, ensilage, fodder, stover, forage, or in combinations. The remaining 15 percent of the crop was exported, that is, sold for cash outside the county. In most years, the practice of feeding corn to livestock brought farmers a greater financial return than selling corn as grain. The costs for transporting livestock to market were generally lower than for transporting grain because livestock compressed the volume of corn into an animal's body weight. When butchered and processed, pork and beef provided more dietary protein to consumers than did corn. Industry leaders urged farmers to increase their profits by feeding corn to livestock. Henry A. Wallace explained that the main challenge for Corn Belt farmers was to obtain the greatest possible weight on livestock from each acre of land with the least expenditure of human effort. The amount of corn that a farm produced directly influenced the number of cattle or hogs it could feed, and in turn, the amount of profit it could make.[21]

Husking from standing corn was a labor-intensive chore that began in October and continued through December and, in some years, January.

Although the length of the husking season varied by farm, and from year to year, most farmers tried to complete the husking by 1 December, if the weather permitted. Between 1920 and 1928, farmers in the Illinois livestock feeding counties of Champaign and Piatt performed 13.3 percent of their husking during October, 60.6 percent in November, 20.4 percent in December, and 5.7 percent in January or later. Farmers began husking as soon as a hard frost ended the corn plant's growth.[22]

Husking from standing corn required, at a minimum, a team of horses, a wagon, and a husking tool, either a peg or a hook. Husking pegs were usually made from a hard wood, such as hickory, or from animal bone. Peg husking was universally practiced until the late 1890s when steel hooks were introduced. W. F. Lillie, of Gage County Nebraska, is credited with inventing a husking hook in 1892, but many other inventors received patents for different styles of husking hooks. Manufacturers produced both palm and thumb hooks that attached to a husker's hand with leather straps. One company, Boss Manufacturing, made hooks at its Kewanee, Illinois, factory for many years. Husking with a hook required an entirely different motion than did peg husking. Husking contests helped dramatize the fact that a hook husker could usually husk much faster than a peg husker, and by 1928, most Midwestern huskers had switched to hooks.[23]

Husking took on the aspects of a ritual, as did other field work which was repeated according to a set of actions over a period of time. In the 1920s, the husking ritual began when a husker guided a team of horses or mules pulling an empty wagon into an unpicked corn field. The husker drove the wagon over the outside row of standing corn, creating a down row, and began the task of picking every marketable ear of corn in the field by hand, one at a time. In one quick motion, the husker broke each ear from the stalk while removing it from the husks. As each ear of corn was removed from the plant, it was thrown into a wagon fitted with a bangboard, a piece of wooden board about three and a half feet high

attached along the entire length of a wagon's opposite side. The corn hit the bangboard and fell into the wagon.

Husking from standing corn was strenuous work, especially if performed rapidly. The work was of a repetitive, rhythmic nature, involving reaching, snapping, throwing, and brisk walking. The size of the corn plant contributed to the hard work involved. In the 1920s, most midwestern corn varieties, including Reid and Krug, carried the ear high on the stalk, often four to five feet off the ground. The hills were spaced three to four feet apart. Huskers with long legs had an advantage over shorter huskers because long legs meant fewer steps between hills. Long arms on huskers also helped them reach the ears easier. The best and fastest husking was performed by adults in good physical condition standing about six foot tall, usually males.

When the wagon was full, a farmer working alone would stop husking, drive the wagon to the corn crib area, and unload the wagon. Until the introduction of mechanical elevators in the early 1920s, farmers had to scoop the corn out of the wagon with a large shovel and fill the crib one shovel-full at a time. Elevators eased this labor by mechanically lifting the corn from the wagon into the crib. The use of elevators had a significant impact on the speed at which the total husking job could be accomplished. Without an elevator, it was almost impossible for one person to harvest more than fifty bushels of corn in a ten-hour day, but by the early 1930s, most hand huskers were able to bring in over one hundred bushels per day because of the time saved using an elevator. Elevators were powered by horses, tractors, and gas motors.[24]

Despite the boasts of corn husking contest organizers, the amount of time required to husk an acre of standing corn by hand did not significantly change from 1920 to 1936, averaging a little under six hours throughout the period. Husking one acre of corn took longer in the eastern and livestock grazing areas than in the cash grain area, where the length of time actually declined a bit from 5.8 to 5 hours during this period.

This was the only section to show a reduction, and the reduction was steady from 1909 to 1936.[25]

Several factors contributed to the reduction in husking time in the cash grain area, the most important being the use of the mechanical picker. Farmers in the cash grain region generally adopted mechanical pickers more quickly than farmers in other areas. A second factor was that corn breeders in this section had been selecting seed from large-eared corn for several decades. Less time was required to pick a bushel of large-eared corn than small-ear corn. Finally, the corn husking contests may have marginally contributed to the reduction by encouraging competitive husking, and in the process raising husking speeds in the corn growing area where speed mattered the most.

The date of the introduction of bangboards in corn harvesting is not known exactly, but roughly coincides with the rise of the practice of husking from standing corn. Farmers in corn-raising areas began using bangboards in the late 1860s as a way to increase their corn-husking efficiency, As late as the 1930s, some older farmers could remember the introduction of bangboards into their areas. J. M. Mamer of Campus, Illinois, remembered that bangboards had been used on his father's farm beginning around 1867. Settlers immigrating to Iowa remembered seeing bangboards for the first time in 1875 in Greene County and in 1878 in Iowa County. By 1920, bangboards were standard equipment for husking from standing corn.[26]

The bangboard made it easier for a farmer to husk alone and in the process, made huskers more efficient and autonomous workers. When husking without a bangboard in standing corn occurred, it was a team effort in which two or three workers filled a wagon together. The two tallest and strongest members of the group husked corn from opposing sides of the wagon while a third picker, usually the smallest person of the group, husked the down row. A person husking down corn had to bend over and hunt for each ear of corn, sometimes hidden in a mass of tangled plants. The

job of husking the down row often fell to teenagers and women on the theory such work required a dexterous person of smaller stature.

Bangboards helped improve a individual husker's speed and ability to drop ears into the wagon, but they made it impossible to husk from both sides of the wagon. Bangboards also eliminated the need for a down row, except when a field was first opened, because standing corn on both sides of the wagon to accommodate two pickers was not necessary. Using a bangboard, the wagon simply travelled in the rows where the corn had already been picked, knocking down the plants in its wake. Even after bangboard husking became widely practiced, farmers sometimes created down rows specifically to utilize the labor of teen-aged children and women who could not easily reach ears in the standing corn. Some taller women preferred using bangboards, and thus freed themselves from the backache of husking the down row.

Team husking continued in a modified form after the introduction of bangboards. Instead of working together, each individual performed a discrete task. Several arrangements of the labor force were possible when husking in groups with bangboards, depending on the number of available huskers, wagons, teams, and horses. The work was generally divided between husking and hauling the corn to the crib, one person husking for part of the day and another person hauling. At noon, they might trade places to even out the work and decrease the boredom. In another variation, each husker could work independently with other huskers in the same field at a staggered intervals, each hauling and unloading their own corn. In either case, the general rule became one husker per wagon. Any number of huskers could work in a field at one time. On family-operated farms, usually only one or two wagons were in the corn field; on larger commercial farms, many wagons worked in a field.

The corn husking contests reflected the individual nature of bangboard husking. In the contests, each husker had his own wagon and team and husked in his own portion of the field, called a land, which had been

carefully delineated from the lands of the other huskers. The contestants raced against the clock and did not interact with each other during the competition. They competed as individuals, never in teams.

Farmer's adoption of mechanical pickers did not at first significantly change work arrangements in corn husking, but some adjustments were necessary. Farmers using horse-drawn pickers found it practically impossible to husk alone because they needed someone to drive the wagon while they operated the picker. Farmers also found that they needed additional horse power when they used the early mechanical pickers. Operating a horse-drawn, one-row picker, for example, could require four to six horses, three to five workers, and three to four wagons, depending on the distance to the crib and the type of unloading equipment available. Farmers sometimes employed their wives and teen-aged children as wagon drivers, as in 1923, a Wallaces' Farmer reader from Jolley, Iowa, reported an instance in which a farmer's wife and son drove the wagons while the farmer operated the horse-drawn picker.[27]

A tractor-powered picker likewise required a minimum of two workers, one to operate the tractor/picker unit and the other to drive the wagon. Again, more wagons and drivers were added if the field was a long distance from the crib area. Several men driving wagons could keep a picker in continuous operation by keeping one wagon beside it at all times. One farmer found that with a mechanical picker, a man and a boy could harvest as much corn in one day as four or five hand huskers.[28]

Inventors had tried to perfect a machine to pick corn from standing stalks as early as the Civil War, but were unsuccessful for many years. Early pickers were pulled through a corn field by a team of horses or mules. A large wheel on the picker, called a bull wheel, transformed ground traction into mechanical power and operated the picker. The practice of husking corn from standing stalks directly influenced the design of the mechanical picker. Inventors fashioned their machines to fit the style of picking in the western corn belt. Mechanical corn pickers,

unlike wheat threshers, were never stationary; even the earliest mechanical pickers were traction powered. Consequently, as the use of mechanical pickers spread, the practice of shocking corn disappeared. Patents on mechanical pickers were granted as early as 1850, and these machines established the basic mechanical principles of snapping the ear from the stalk. Wide variations in the size and shape of corn ears, as well as the tightness of the husks and complications derived from wet weather and muddy fields posed problems for inventors.[29]

Around 1902 the first practical pickers were developed, and sales increased during World War I along with farmers' incomes. About three thousand mechanical pickers were manufactured in both 1919 and 1920, but picker sales declined when farm prices collapsed at the end of the War. At the same time, the rates for hand husking also declined, and hand husking returned as a viable alternative to mechanical husking. After 1920, mechanical pickers only replaced hand labor when it was economical to do so. Generally, most farmers chose to hire hand huskers when the going wage was less than one-sixth of the market price of a bushel of corn. Farmers turned to mechanical picking when hand husking wages rose beyond this level.[30]

Farmers found that horse-drawn pickers were temperamental and worked best only under ideal conditions. Farmers found that the bull wheel lost traction when the ground was uneven or soft, and under these conditions, pickers performed miserably. Some farmers complained that the horses walked too slowly for optimum operation. To improve the picker's operation, some farmers added an auxiliary gas engine. The engine provided constant and steady power; but the increased weight of the picker required even more horsepower to pull it through the corn field.[31]

Farmers, manufacturers, government agencies, and agricultural colleges spent considerable effort comparing hand husking with horse-drawn mechanical pickers. Through the 1920s, farm journals carried an on-going discussion of the subject. Although Wallaces' Farmer urged its readers to

use the findings of the experiment stations to decide whether or not a picker would be profitable in their particular situation, the journal also published numerous letters and articles describing farmers' first-hand experiences with mechanical pickers. Some farmers relied on their own experiences to evaluate the usefulness of the machines and shared those experiences with Wallaces' Farmer readers. In 1923, an Iowa farmer who operated a three hundred twenty-acre general farm with one hundred acres of corn reported that he had purchased a horse-drawn picker in 1918, the first farmer in his area to do so. He found that the picker worked best when the corn stood upright, the ground was firm, the weather was cloudy or damp weather, and stalks and husks were dry but not brittle.[32]

Another Iowa farmer, who had owned his machine for four years by 1923, wrote to Wallaces' Farmer to say that during only one harvest had he been able to husk as much with the machine as he could with human labor. He had not used his picker in the other three years because either the corn was down from the wind and rain, or the husks were too dry, or the cost of hiring a hand husker was lower than the cost of running the picker. A Sheridan County, Nebraska farmer, who hired a machine to pick his corn in 1924, was unhappy with the delays caused when the machine clogged and broke down. From his experience, he concluded that horse-drawn mechanical pickers wore out too quickly to warrant the purchase price.[33]

In 1924, farmers in Keith County, Nebraska, found that they derived no benefits when using a horse-drawn mechanical picker to harvest corn yielding less than twenty bushels per acre; in that case it was cheaper to harvest by hand. The Nebraska Farmer concluded that a farmer should consider the purchase of a picker only if the corn stood up well and made a good yield, if labor was not too high-priced, and if the husks were green or damp.[34]

Other farmers were fully satisfied with their early pickers. In 1923, the Hahn Brothers, farming in Sheridan County, Nebraska, found that their machine paid for itself in one season, husking over six thousand bushels

at a cost of about four cents per bushel when hand husking was running around eleven cents. The Hahns used three men, nine horses, and two wagons to maintain continuous husking operation during the daylight hours. Wallaces' Farmer calculated that if a crew of two men using a machine could pick about six loads, or two hundred twenty bushels, per day, the addition of a third man would about double the output and make husking even more efficient. In 1927, one farmer living near Sioux City, Iowa, reported that he preferred the machine over human labor because it picked more of the corn in each row than hired pickers.[35]

Western farmers favored mechanical pickers when they had a surplus of corn. In 1923, several Sheridan County, Nebraska, farmers purchased pickers to harvest their larger-than-normal corn crop. The big crop created a labor shortage, which drove up husking wages and reduced the profits promised by the bigger yield. Many farmers felt that owning a mechanical picker gave them greater control over their own harvest.[36]

One of the chief criticisms of machine husking at this time was that even when field conditions were good the machine left a great deal of corn in the field. T. J. Charles of the Ohio Farmer had tried to convince his readers that this was not really a disadvantage because a hired husker would likely overlook the same amount of corn in similar field conditions, or the husker would demand higher wages as a compensation for picking loose ears off the ground. Henry A. Wallace advocated machine husking, but only if followed by turning cattle, hogs, and sheep into fields to forage the dropped corn. During the 1920s, the farm journals promoted using animals to compliment the use of the one-row, bull wheel-powered mechanical picker.[37]

Wallaces' Farmer cautioned that if a farmer had no livestock available to glean his field after machine picking, all the corn left by the picker would be lost, the monetary value of which ranged from the price of a tax assessment to an entire year's mortgage payment. Hogs were the best gleaners because they searched for every last kernel. If no stock was

available to glean a field, Wallaces' Farmer advised hand husking over machine picking.[38]

Some bull-wheel pickers could be adapted to be pulled by tractors, which improved power and speed, but before the mid-1920s, tractors were too large and awkward to operate well in the smaller fields of the Midwest. Henry Ford's Fordson tractor, for instance, had been introduced in 1917, but was not practical for most midwestern farms. Nevertheless, in 1919, 13 percent of midwestern farmers used a tractor to pull moldboard plows, and 11 percent pulled disk harrows with their tractor. Through the 1920s and 1930s, manufacturers improved tractor design for smaller fields and made tractors better able to operate larger and heavier implements so that in 1929, about 38 percent of tractors were used to pull plows, a number rising to 52 percent in 1936.[39]

International Harvester brought out its first McCormick-Deering Farmall tractors in 1924, giving midwestern farmers an all-purpose tractor built for row crops. The Farmall had a high rear-axle clearance, a gear drive, closely spaced front wheels, and enough power to pull a two-bottom plow. In 1928, the John Deere Company introduced its first general purpose tractor, the model 10-20. The numerical designation signified that the tractor had ten horsepower available in the drawbar and twenty horsepower for external belts. The 10-20 was equipped with a power-lift enabling the operator to lift implements off the ground while turning around at the ends of a row. In 1924, a Nebraska farmer reported using a 16-30 tractor to pull both a mechanical corn picker and a wagon. With this arrangement, the farmer found that he could harvest around six hundred bushels of corn in one day by himself, but needed yields of thirty-five to forty bushels per acre to make the machine return his investment.[40]

Problems related to providing operating power to mechanical pickers were solved with the introduction of the power take-off, commonly called a PTO, in the 1920s. The PTO was an extension of a tractor's driveshaft, running under the operator's seat and out the rear end of the tractor. It

transferred operating power from the tractor to an implement. The power-take off answered many farmer's objections to mechanical pickers, and directly influenced the increase their use of pickers. In 1919, 30 percent of Corn Belt farmers had used their tractor primarily to pull corn pickers, by 1929, the number had risen to 68 percent, and by 1936, 87 percent of Corn Belt farmers used tractors mainly to pull pickers. The PTO replaced the bull-wheel, thus it increased the picker's reliability and effectiveness, especially under adverse picking conditions.[41]

Farmers, even those who had been disappointed in their experiences with early mechanical pickers, tried the new, tractor-powered pickers. Herman Sarow, of Osceola, Nebraska, reflected on the pickers that he had purchased during the 1920s. Sarow considered his first picker to be a failure because his corn was very heavy and the bull-wheel could not provide enough power to run the machine. Sarow felt that his second picker had been slow, wasteful, and expensive. His third picker, a two-row model pulled by a 10-20 Ford tractor with a power take-off, proved to be a success, harvesting heavy-yielding corn with ease.[42]

The power take-off allowed manufacturers to make lighter-weight pickers that were easier to pull through the corn fields. Significantly, these pickers were designed to be used with tractors, not horses. A farmer purchasing a new picker committed himself to tractor power for several years. By the late 1920s, power take-offs were operating most new, one-row corn pickers. Sales of mechanical pickers reflected the popularity of the tractor-powered implement; in the late 1920s, nation-wide sales approached ten thousand tractors each year.[43]

The decision to purchase a tractor was, for the most part, a business decision, although personal preference and cultural practices influenced the choice. A farmer's age, access to capital, and farm characteristics were economic factors of first importance to the decision. Often, the first farms adopting tractor power were large enterprises, like the seven-thousand acre Fairview Farm near Odebolt, Iowa, which reportedly reduced

its 1926 harvesting costs in terms of time and labor by using fifteen tractors to pull and operate the same number of mechanical corn pickers. One man in each tractor was able to cover ten to eleven acres per day, or six times as much as hand picking, so that the fifteen machines replaced sixty hand pickers.[44]

Few of the farmers who incorporated tractors into their existing operations anticipated that tractors would eventually replace the horse entirely. For at least a decade, the debate centered around which was the best form of farm power under certain conditions, not which should be the sole source of farm power. In the 1920s, some groups of progressive farmers were arguing that the horse had passed its period of usefulness in modern agriculture, but most farmers used horses as long as they afforded an economic advantage. Early tractors had only a slight impact on existing farming practices, and horses continued to power many operations. As tractor ownership expanded, farmers used horses to pull lighter equipment, such as tooth harrows, rotary hoes, and cultivators for many years until equipment manufacturers discontinued production of horse drawn equipment.

Horses continued to be serviceable and adaptable sources of power for farms, but became expensive relative to tractors when feed prices rose. During periods of depressed farm prices, feed costs on the farm were greatly lowered and farmers found it more economical to use horses than tractors. In 1930, for example, when feed prices were low, researchers at the Illinois experiment station calculated that the substitution of the tractor for the horse on some farms might result in only small cost savings. When prices of hay and grain rose, however, tractors with their other advantages again became much cheaper than animal power. In 1936, the Research Department of the Farm Equipment Institute reported that the annual cost of feeding one horse in 1933 was approximately $21.80, and by 1935, the cost had risen to $83.31. The cost of operating a tractor remained approximately unchanged during the same period, so that in comparison with feeding a horse, operating a tractor was less subject to

fluctuations in operating costs. When tractors became economically feasible, other features, such as the ability to work at a faster rate and increased traction power weighted the economic argument in their favor.[45]

The rate of increase in the number of tractors on farms was influenced by a farmer's ability to afford the purchase price. Between 1925 and 1930, the number of tractors on farms increased about 62 percent, but over the next five years the increase was only 22 percent. An upswing in tractor buying began again in the latter part of 1934 and continued during the first half of 1935. By 1936, approximately three-quarters of the farms in the livestock feeding section used tractors, followed by two-thirds of the farms in the cash grain and western sections, and one-half of the farms in the eastern section. In the late 1930s, the retail price of a one-plow, general purpose tractor, weighing less than one ton and mounted on rubber tires fell below five hundred dollars for the first time, making it increasingly possible for farmers to acquire a tractor.[46]

Agricultural engineers introduced other improvements in tractors, such as pneumatic rubber tires, which greatly improved the mobility of farm equipment. Since the 1920s, agricultural engineers had been trying to adapt rubber tires to tractors. A pivotal breakthrough occurred when researchers switched from high-pressure to low-pressure tires. Around 1932, Allis-Chalmers introduced its first tractor on pneumatic tires made by Firestone Rubber Company. By 1935, 14 percent of tractors manufactured in the United States were mounted on low-pressure rubber tires, increasing to 85 percent by 1940. The advantages of rubber tires over the older steel tires were immediately apparent. Pneumatic tires provided better traction in muddy fields, compacted the soil less, and had less tendency to cut ruts in soft ground than steel tires. Rubber made riding easier and reduced vibrations, which translated into less wear and tear on tractor parts. Rubber tires made the tractor a useful farm-to-market vehicle because it could haul corn to railroad elevators over paved roads. Finally, changes in gear ratios made higher speeds on roads possible.[47]

As the operation of mechanical pickers became more cost-efficient, farmers felt increased pressure to purchase them. The Ohio Farmer, for example, urged its readers to adopt mechanical pickers as a way to achieve efficient farming. In 1929, T. J. Charles wrote, "Corn husking has long been looked upon as an all-fall job. The necessity of spending three months of the year on this one operation has always been a drawback to crop and livestock diversification, and to spending more time building up the farm. Cutting down on this peak operation will allow larger acreage, reduced expenses, and more efficient management."[48]

State extension stations conducted several studies and surveys on the profitability of picking corn by machine versus hand husking. Many ways of comparing machine and hand husking were possible, including comparison of volume, time, and cost. In the late 1920s, the Ohio State Extension service conducted a study that compared one and two-row mechanical pickers against hand husking on sixty-five farms in Wood County, Scioto Valley, and Miami Valley, Ohio. The study found that a tractor-powered, two-row picker could practically double the amount of corn picked in one day by a one-row machine. Three men using a one-row picker pulled by a tractor, and two teams and wagons to haul the corn to the crib, harvested an average of 6.7 acres a day. Four men using the same equipment configuration, except with a two-row picker, harvested an average of 12.7 acres per day. Four men husking entirely by hand grossed a daily average of fifty-six bushels from about four acres per day, demonstrating that the two-row picker harvested almost twice as much acreage as a one-row picker and three times as much as hand labor. Pickers also became less wasteful; the 1936 National Research Project found that newer mechanical pickers tended to leave only about 5 percent more of the yield in the field than did hand huskers.[49]

Not only did mechanical pickers harvest more acreage, they also saved time. In a study conducted on one hundred twenty-two Illinois farms in 1928 and 1929, the USDA compared the time spent husking by hand with the

time used husking with one-row and two-row pickers. The study found that husking one acre of corn with a two-row picker used 2.2 hours, husking the same area with a one-row picker took 2.7 hours, and hand husking one acre took 5.2 hours.[50]

Researchers found that mechanical pickers not only harvested more corn in less time than manual husking, and they often did so for less cost. In 1928 for example, Ohio farmers paid seven cents per bushel for operating a one-row picker, but paid twelve cents per bushel for hand husking. Alternatively, when wages were low, as in Nebraska in 1931, the costs for hand and machine husking were approximately equal, about four to five cents per bushel, according to the Nebraska Farmer. In 1930, USDA researchers found that in Illinois the cost per acre was lower for machine husking than for hand husking: husking with a two-row picker was $3.14 per acre, husking with a one-row picker was $3.74 per acre, while hand husking ran about $4.46 per acre. In the Wood County, Ohio, study, researchers reported higher overall cost for all types of husking, but ultimately found that machine husking was cheaper than hand husking. The average total cost with the one-row picker was $3.85 per acre compared with $6.47 per acre for hand husking.[51]

Although machine husking was proving advantageous, hand husking was still common, especially during the early 1930s when Depression unemployment helped drive down wages. In 1933, farmers in Grundy County, Iowa, were able to hire crews of unemployed men from Waterloo to pick corn for the equivalent of one and a half cents per bushel. Farmers, hiring the huskers through an employment agency, paid no cash for the work performed, but provided each man with a loaf of bread a day, a pair of husking mittens, and additional farm food products, which were held in a Waterloo warehouse until the end of the husking season. Husking wages were so low that farmers who owned mechanical pickers were urged to leave them in the shed and employ men who had families "because it was no more expensive to use human labor than machine labor."[52]

Although the labor program turned out well for the farmers and for the unemployed workers, the following year when wages were higher, the editor of the Grundy Register argued against the practice, saying that corn picking jobs should be given to county residents first. Perhaps responding to local criticism of the use of imported labor, editor J. J. Vanderwicken reported that several hundred county pickers were employed for this work every year and that one month's work in the corn fields could feed and house a poor family for two months during the winter. Mechanical pickers should again be left in the shed in 1933, Vanderwicken advised, as the crop could be picked as cheap by hand, and four men could be given a job of every machine that was left idle. In September, the editor estimated that husking wages were expected to range from two to three cents per bushel; in 1932 husking wages had ranged from one to two cents a bushel. The corn yield was smaller in 1933 and corn prices were more than double what they had been a year earlier.[53]

The cost of husking fluctuated widely during the 1920s and 1930s, and it frustrated farmers who wanted to know what their exact costs would be if they mechanized their corn harvest. Researchers, however, encountered many uncontrollable variables when carrying out their studies, and these variables make it difficult to compare the results of the studies. One of the most important variables was the condition of the corn in the field, which depended, among other things, on soil fertility, weather, seed, disease, and infestation. Down corn required more time and effort from both machines and men. Heavier-yielding corn took more time to harvest than lighter-yielding corn. The condition and age of the mechanical picker affected its operation.

A certain amount of husking costs were fixed, such as the cost for wagons, horses or tractors, and hooks. Labor was the most important variable cost that farmers had to consider, and the wage that farmers paid to hand huskers varied with the market price of corn. By acting as competitions for husking work, the two-row, tractor-powered picker helped

lower the cost of husking, prompting the USDA to announce in 1930 that using the picker was cheaper than husking by hand. The farm journals, along with the extension service, urged farmers to operate mechanical pickers. "Agricultural engineers generally agree that 100 acres of 50-bushel corn will justify the purchase of a picker. On many farms with smaller acreage where other work calls for attention, a picker-husker may be found economical in order to get the corn in the crib as soon as possible," advised Charles of the Ohio Farmer in 1929.[54]

Mechanical pickers, however, contained hidden costs that farmers only realized after purchasing the machine. Economic historian Allan Bogue points out that many farmers who adopted mechanical pickers actually lowered their total output per acre during the 1920s and 1930s because they supported two power systems: horses and tractors. Crop cultivation, for example, was performed better by horses. Mechanical pickers remained expensive relative to horses on most farms until the land used for growing feed for horses was given over to corn. A farmer's exclusive use of tractors could release land used to raise oats and timothy, thereby increasing the total corn acreage on a farm and reducing the cost of tractor operation per acre, Bogue explains. The drawback was that a tractor also required the eventual purchase of farm machinery designed for tractor operations.[55]

Many picker owners were unable to realize optimum operating conditions every year, consequently they continued to harvest part of their crop by hand. In 1931, Illinois farmers owning pickers harvested about one-fourth of their crop by hand. Hand husking was still necessary for corn that had been blown down, but some farmers also husked by hand in conjunction with machine husking in order to get the corn out of the field as quickly as possible.[56]

The comparative cost of husking was not the only factor farmers considered when deciding whether or not to buy a mechanical picker. Farmers who hired others to do their husking especially liked machines

because they eliminated the inconvenience and cost of boarding huskers in the farm home, and farmers did not have to listen to the grumblings of the huskers when the corn was down and the weather was bad.[57]

Some farmers who purchased mechanical pickers hoped to offset the purchase price by custom picking, that is, selling their husking services. In October 1928, for example, the Kewanee Star-Courier reported that eight farmers in Henry County had recently purchased a two-row corn picking machine and planned to pick their neighbors' corn to help pay for it. The editor noted that the high cost of hand husking made mechanization economically feasible. Custom picking, however, was not always profitable. A 1925 field survey conducted by the Nebraska Farmer showed that one-third of farmers who performed custom work with tractor-powered pickers did not charge enough to cover their machine expenses, let alone earn a wage. This situation resulted more from farmers not knowing their operating costs than from problems with the pickers, the journal explained.[58]

Men who depended on husking work in the fall were increasingly displaced by the machines during this period. Farmers who used harvest labor ranged from those who planted large corn acreage in the expectation of hiring help at harvest time to those who got behind with their husking, or had a bigger yield than they expected, and needed temporary help to get the corn out of the field. Some of the huskers displaced by machine husking were young men from large families who were almost always available to husk corn for others. Established farmers often hired out after they finished their own husking in order to earn some extra cash. These farmers lost a source of income when machine husking became widespread. Yet, because most huskers were also farmers who wanted to reduce the amount of labor required in their farm tasks, they welcomed mechanization and adopted it for themselves at the earliest opportunity.[59]

Farmers had to balance the advantages of mechanical husking against the disadvantages. Machines wasted more ears and left more shelled corn in the field. They afforded little or no fodder, packed the ground, often did

not remove all of the husks, and required a large investment. Manufacturers focused on correcting the most objectional characteristics of mechanical pickers. They were successful enough that, in the 1931 Illinois study, researchers found that only a very small amount of corn, less than two bushels per acre, was found left behind in the field by a mechanical picker. About one-third of the farmers in the study picked up the corn left in the field by the machine and about half of the farms turned livestock into the field to glean after the machine. The others simply abandoned the corn as lost.[60]

Implement manufacturers continually expanded their lines of mechanical pickers, introducing the two-row picker in 1928 and a two-row tractor-mounted model in 1931. In the early 1930s, one-person operation became possible with the tractor double hitch, designed to pull both a wagon and a picker. In another arrangement, the picker attached to the side of the tractor, making one unit, but a second person was necessary to drive the wagon. Both John Deere and International Harvester offered corn pickers with overhead tanks capable of holding between twenty and twenty-five bushels of corn. To unload the tank, a worker simply pulled a wagon alongside the tractor and released a lever which dropped a chute over the wagon box, and the corn slid out of the tank into the wagon.[61]

In the mid 1930s, the rising number of mechanical pickers on midwestern farms suggests that farmers generally preferred machine husking over hand husking. This trend even extended to corn husking contest champions. For example, the 1929 national champion husker announced his intention to buy a mechanical picker after he was beaten by a machine in a demonstration. The cash grain and western sections of the corn belt led the region in the number of pickers on farms. In 1936, 20 percent of the farms in those sections used mechanical pickers. In Ohio, over four thousand pickers were in use in 1934, mostly on the large corn fields in the western and southern parts of the state. Despite these trends, picker

sales did not surpass those of the late 1920s until after 1937, a year in which almost fourteen thousand pickers were manufactured.[62]

By the mid-1930s, manufacturers were producing mechanical pickers that could perform husking as well as humans under most conditions. When Ohio farmers listed the advantages of machine husking they did so in terms of hand husking. They said that machine husking reduced harvest labor problems, afforded faster methods of harvesting corn, made the work easier, lowered harvesting costs, got corn in the crib earlier in the season, and increased a farmer's corn acreage. As early as 1933, the Nebraska Farmer reported that instead of finishing the harvest by Christmas, farmers were now finishing their husking by Thanksgiving, thanks to mechanical pickers.[63]

Henry A. Wallace argued, as did many others, that many varieties of corn grown in the Midwest were unsuited to machine husking. Specifically, the shanks of Reid-type corn were too thin, and the plants had a tendency to lean and fall over after they reached maturity, but before picking could be completed. Mechanical pickers lost many ears when the shanks became brittle in freezing weather. Reid's Yellow Dent was ideal for hand husking, but poor for machine husking. During the early 1920s, Wallace believed that mechanical pickers would not be widely adopted until they could do a good job picking Reid-type corn, but gradually Wallace, like many others, saw the solution to that problem in the corn, not in the picker.[64]

Hybrid corn, although easier to husk with a machine than open-pollinated, still posed difficulties for manufacturers and farmers because substantial differences among hybrids affected machine picking. Short-shanked corn fed through the snapping rollers easier than did long-shanked varieties, which tended to hang down from the plant and thus not feed properly. Long shanks permitted ears to get outside the guards on the picker where they were likely to fall to the ground and be lost. Under dry conditions, mechanical pickers still shelled poorly. In 1939, for example,

many Illinois farmers had to finish their husking by hand because the machines were shelling too much corn in the field.[65]

Ears which were too slender at the butt often fed into the rollers a short distance before the ear broke free from the stalk, causing shelling at the base of the ear and lost corn. Corn with a large butt was more suitable than any other type for most machines. The strength of the shank had to be just right. If the shank was too weak, the ear might be lost to windstorms before husking began. If the shank was too tough, shelling at the base occurred while the machine tried to snap the ear off. The difference between a weak and a tough shank was slight, but it made a significant difference in machine husking. To complicate the problem, many farmers wanted corn that could be husked easily both by hand and by machine. Breeders soon discovered that hybrids with stronger stalks reduced the amount of down corn in the field and made hand husking more efficient as well. Hybridization standardized corn so that machines could harvest corn completely and yet be practical under a wide variety of circumstances.[66]

Mechanical pickers only provided a clear and distinct advantage over human huskers after breeders developed strong, sturdy, high-yielding plants that would not fall over in the field and which possessed two ears per plant placed at a uniform height. Once the corn plant was redesigned for mechanical pickers, farmers readily purchased and used the machines. As manufacturers improved their machine designs, and corn was bred to be picked mechanically, hogging down corn fell out of practice. Through the 1930s, fewer farmers bothered to glean behind the ever more efficient mechanical pickers. During World War II, however, some farmers resumed the practice of turning livestock into their corn fields. One farmer, who said he had not hogged down any corn in over ten years, indicated that he could not hire enough hand laborers or get a mechanical picker to harvest all his corn. He turned his hogs into the field so that the corn would not be totally wasted.[67]

The gradual, uneven adoption of tractors, mechanical pickers, and hybrid seed corn into existing farming practices had several unforseen consequences. Often after a farmer adopted one of the changes, he found that other, unanticipated, changes were necessary. A farmer without a tractor would probably not buy a mechanical picker, but a farmer already owning a tractor would probably seriously consider purchasing such a machine. The adoption of mechanical pickers gradually reduced the need for hand huskers, and reduced the labor requirements of farming neighborhoods. Some individuals and farm families may have moved away from an area because of the lack of harvest work. Over a period of several years, the available labor pool was diminished and this created an even greater dependence upon mechanical husking.[68]

By 1940, hybrids, mechanical pickers, and tractors formed a fundamental triad in the midwestern corn harvest. When combined, these innovations encouraged farmers to accept their growing dependence on agricultural production suppliers. Although many elements of corn farming remained unchanged, the fundamental thrust was away from local variation and built-in flexibility and toward standardization and dependence.

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MIDWESTERN TOWNS AND CORN HUSKING CONTESTS

From the mid-1920s until 1941, midwestern small towns played an instrumental role in planning and carrying out the many details involved in holding the organized corn husking contests. These contests had been started by leading midwestern farm journals as a means of improving efficiency and speed in the corn harvest. Through the contests, journal editors such as Henry A. Wallace, Clifford Gregory, Sam McKelvie, Dan Wallace, and Arthur Capper sought to identify the techniques used by the fastest and cleanest hand huskers and spread the use of those techniques throughout the Corn Belt. Farm journals, lacking the personnel to handle the various contest tasks, turned to civic groups in towns located near contest sites to organize committees and mobilize volunteer workers.[1]

Town leaders used the contests to advertise the progressive spirit of their town to the rest of the nation, which they were able to do through the national newsreel films, news wire services, and radio broadcasting networks then developing. Practically every national corn husking contest was filmed; United Press and Associated Press routinely sent reporters to cover the contests. State and national contests, beginning with the Illinois state contests, were broadcast by radio, many by the National Broadcasting Company affiliate WLS in Chicago. By the 1928 national contest, held near Fowler, Indiana, the contests were receiving extensive media coverage that increased each year. In 1934, [Minnesota] Farmer editor Dan Wallace wrote, only slightly boasting, "the nation will be listening" to the "greatest of all rural sporting events," the national corn husking contest near Fairmont, Minnesota. The notoriety coming to a town hosting a state or national contest could be translated into a financial reward. As the editor of the Benton Review explained regarding the 1928 national contest held near Benton, Indiana, "What the holding of the contest has done in the way of favorable publicity cannot be estimated in dollars and cents."[2]

Through their involvement in the corn husking contests, midwestern towns strengthened the bond between industrial culture and farming practices. Seeking their own best interest first, towns helped develop cooperative methods linking the countryside to national organizations and networks. Historians have characterized the growing influence of modern industrial values and practices in rural areas as a struggle for cultural dominance between urban and rural worlds. Most historians downplay the importance of small towns in this dynamic, or they overlook small towns entirely. Whether they champion the progressive force of modernity or side with the moral virtues of traditional farm life, historians usually conclude that the rural world was too weak to withstand the external pressure, and industrialized. In contrast, this study argues that small towns played an integral role in resolving the tension by synthesizing aspects of both cultures into a unique blend whose most dramatic expression was the organized corn husking contests. Admittedly, industrial values and practices did prevail, but towns provided local institutions and structures for rural residents to participate in the shaping of the resulting culture.[3]

Fundamentally, farm journal editors relied on a town's booster spirit of cooperation, guided by the hand of business competition, to motivate contest involvement. Twentieth-century boosterism differed only slightly from that of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s and 1930s, few towns believed that they could significantly change their importance within their regional trading area, but many did believe that a slight improvement over a nearby rival could benefit the local economy. Furthermore, small-town business leaders felt pressure to adopt modern, progressive methods and ideas in order to remain competitive, and they realized the importance of projecting a progressive image through advertising.[4]

In midwestern towns, business operators sought not only their own profit, but also to stimulate economic activity within the entire

community. Boosterism held that individual business interests were identical with community interests; a local store owner not only reaped profits from customers, but reinvested those profits in the community through jobs, taxes, and personal consumption from other business owners. Proponents found that the booster ethos tempered individual competitiveness within midwestern communities through the understanding that the fortunes of each resident were tied to the prosperity of the town as a whole.

The booster ethic demanded that the corn husking contests be promoted primarily as a public good. The ultimate community good derived from the contest would be an earlier completion of the harvest with more marketable corn. Farm journal editors, town leaders, farmers, and town residents believed that they would benefit in an indirect, yet definite, way, thus they were willing to make an individual contribution toward achieving that goal. In addition to enhancing the common good, each town group involved in the contests hoped to enjoy spin-off benefits. For the town as a whole, the spin-off benefit was to be recognized for their organizational ability and managerial skill.

Local newspaper stories of upcoming contests were one indicator of boosterism at work. The number of stories about local, state, and national contests, and their placement in the newspapers reflected the local editor's enthusiasm for the contests and attitude concerning the importance of the contests for his community. When the Platte City, Missouri, Chamber of Commerce organized the 1929 national contest, for example, the editor of the Landmark praised the splendid cooperation among the Platte City merchants for their role in promoting Platte City to the world. Their efforts had "placed Platte City before the world as never before," with announcements of the contest appearing in every daily and weekly paper in the United State and one or two in Europe in the weeks before the contest. "It is but another evidence of what can be done by all working together," crowed the editor.[5]

Towns used formal structures, especially committees and civic groups, to organize their involvement in the corn husking contests. Most midwestern towns had a Commercial Club, a Chamber of Commerce, a Business Men's Associations, or a Retail Merchants' Association that worked actively for community growth and prosperity, somewhat like a civic board of directors. Every midwestern town that hosted a state or national contest had at least one of these groups in the forefront of contest planning and organization.

For state and national contests, these groups ran committees which provided life support services, such as water, emergency medical treatment, garbage removal, law enforcement, emergency telephone service, traffic control, sewage disposal. In the process of providing the order and services needed to serve a large, but temporary, city at the contest site, towns faced some typical urban problems, such as rowdy behavior, traffic jams, and crime. Working through the committee system, midwestern towns organized and carried out a corn husking contest in which everything worked according to an overall plan, everyone performed their assigned job, a relatively well-mannered crowd attended, no serious mishap or embarrassment occurred, and their efforts were admired and applauded by the nation at-large.

Farm journal editors worked closely with town groups in planning and holding state and national contests. Often their first point of contact with a town was through the county agricultural extension agent, who played a key role working with town groups on a contest. The journal editors typically allowed towns a wide latitude in the scope of their participation, but within a few years after the start of the contests, a general pattern of town involvement developed, consisting of holding a banquet and a parade, decorating Main Street, selling food from lunch stands, and providing amateur entertainment. Within the general pattern of activity, towns from Ohio to Kansas had an opportunity to demonstrate their organizational and management ability.

Town leaders not only employed modern business practices and structures in organizing the contests, but they also modeled their involvement on the existing small-town public culture, which was designed to bring the rural population into town to spend money. Years of sponsoring county agricultural fairs, Fourth of July celebrations, holiday parades, county picnics, homecomings, street dances, pageants, and sports events gave town business leaders a wealth of experience in organizing the activities associated with the corn husking contests.[6]

Although the corn husking contests borrowed much from these events, the contests differed from them in that the contests developed under the outside supervision of the farm journal editors, they required a high level of cooperation from a plethora of volunteer groups, they brought state and national media attention to the community, and they were held in privately-owned farm fields, often located miles away from town.

Town groups closed the distance between their location and that of the contest site in two ways. First, a specific town was identified by farm journal editors as being primarily responsible for local details. Towns often competed vigorously for this title. In 1928, civic groups in two Henry County, Illinois, towns, Kewanee and Galva, each wanted to host the state contest. Each town group petitioned the Prairie Farmer, which chose Galva because of its proximity to the contest site via good roads. In Nebraska, the Community Club of West Point lobbied the Nebraska Farmer for several years before it was granted the 1933 national contest. In their many pre-contest news stories, editors identified the host town, announced the preparations that town groups were making, gave directions to the contest field from the town, and even printed road maps to the contest site which showed the location of the town.[7]

Second, towns reached out to draw as many county-wide groups and organizations into contest preparation and work as possible, under their organizational umbrella. Especially for state and national contests, the county agricultural agent worked with the host town to recruit help from

the entire county area. Unifying the efforts of county American Legion members, encouraging all county churches to run food stands, and recruiting farmers to help prepare the contest field were just a few of the methods used to involve the larger community in the contests.

Corn husking contests were held on three levels: county, state, and national. The amount of town involvement was different for each type of contest. Attendance at the national corn husking contests rose steadily through two decades, from about 1000 visitors in 1924, to 75,000 in 1934, and to 125,000 in 1941. As a result of their growing scope and organizational complexity, the contests challenged town boosters to show that their town could live up to its promise of putting on a progressive, well-organized contest. Ensuring that all volunteers knew their jobs and were ready to perform during the national and state contests required extensive effort from people who normally did not organize their activity to such an elaborate degree.

Towns had extensive organizational freedom in the county contests, but received practically no outside publicity for these contests. County contests were important because huskers advanced to state and national contests upon winning in their home county. Town groups usually let the agricultural agent organize and run the contest, while they provided financial support. Agricultural agents publicizing county contests, convinced local huskers to enter, located a suitable contest field, lined up the equipment, and calculated the husker's scores. Sometimes, however, town groups did a substantial amount of county contest work. In 1925, the Fort Dodge Rotary Club in Webster County, Iowa, furnished the field, the wagons, drivers, and teams, while the county agent collected contest applications.[8]

County contest prizes came primarily from businesses and community leaders and from the general population, while farm journals provided prizes for state and national contests. In 1925, the Fort Dodge Rotary offered a prize of fifty dollars cash to the first place winner. Another

fifty dollars was divided among the other high-placing contestants. In 1928, the Grundy County, Iowa, prize money came from cash collected from twenty-one individuals and businesses, including county banks. In 1932, Redwood County, Minnesota, raised prize money for its contest by holding a benefit dance. In 1929, the Piatt County Farm Bureau corn husking contest winners received prizes donated by local businesses, ranging from ten dollars for first place to two dollars for last place. Businessmen reimbursed the county champion his traveling expenses after he returned to Piatt County from competing in the state contest.[9]

National and state contests required more planning and overall involvement from towns than did county contests. By the mid-1930s, town groups were planning national and some state contests two or more years in advance. Town delegations routinely traveled to contests in other states to observe how the host communities handled the crowds, laid out the husking grounds, and prepared for every possible circumstance. Using their observations as a blueprint for their own event, the visitors noted the trouble spots and adopted ideas that seemed to work best.

The Fairmont, Minnesota, Civic and Commerce Association began planning its sponsorship of the 1934 national contest in 1931. Similarly, in 1936, a delegation of forty-five businessmen and farmers from Saline County, Missouri, visited the national contest in Ohio to plan for the 1937 national contest. The 1938 national contest in Sioux Falls received ambassadors from towns hoping to hold state and national contests in 1939 and 1940. A Lawrence, Kansas, contingent came in preparation for hosting the Kansas state contest in 1939, and representatives from the Red Oak, Iowa, Chamber of Commerce, visited Sioux Falls to prepare their petition to Wallaces' Farmer for the 1940 contest.[10]

Several towns hosted a state contest as practice for a national contest. National contests, with their ability to attract tens of thousands of spectators, required the greatest amount of planning and preparation by towns. The national contests rotated among the midwestern

states so that only Illinois' Prairie Farmer hosted three national contests. Most of the other farm journals hosted two national contests in their state. When it was their turn to host a national contest, the sponsoring farm journal and the host community pulled out all the stops to make their national contest the best ever held.

Towns first became involved with state-level corn husking contests in 1924 when Clifford Gregory, editor of the Prairie Farmer, asked I. A. Madden, the Sangamon County, Illinois, farm agent to manage that state's first corn husking contest. Madden requested assistance from the Springfield Chamber of Commerce for finding wagons, drivers and gleaners, forming a parking committee, and providing food for anticipated visitors. Gregory planned the contest entertainment and arranged for a newsreel company to film the contest. The contest attracted approximately thirty-five hundred people to the F. I. Taylor farm near New Berlin, Sangamon County.[11]

The following year, 1925, the Burgess, Illinois, Men's Community Club organized and carried out local details for the Prairie Farmer's Midwest regional contest. The Community Club mobilized members of the Mercer County Farm Bureau and the Aledo Kiwanis to handle parking, gleaning, policing the crowd, guest reception, wagon driving, entertainment, food, and program speakers. In this and later contests, committees prepared the contest field, rearranged fences, painted signs, built wooden food stands, and carried supplies. At the 1926 Illinois state contest, held near Elmira, the women's Culture Club provided a rest tent for lady visitors, and the Kewanee Public Hospital staffed a First Aid Tent.[12]

Each year, the number of local people required to conduct a national contest expanded. Comparison of the 1927 national contest held near Fairmont, Minnesota, with the 1938 national contest held near Sioux Falls, South Dakota, reveals the contest's expanding committee structure. In 1927, about 75 volunteers worked on a few committees to serve 3000 visitors, but in 1938, about 2500 volunteers worked on seventeen

committees to serve 125,000 visitors. In 1938, eight hundred men guarded the huskers and wagons and approximately sixty county farmers helped weigh the corn and husks and determine the scores. The national contests held during the late 1930s routinely required between two and three thousand volunteers working in committees to direct traffic, police the crowd, guard the huskers during the contest, and feed the visitors.[13]

The 1931 national contest, near Grundy Center, Iowa, relied heavily on community organizations and local farmers. Wallaces' Farmer editor Henry A. Wallace chose Grundy County to host the national because of the county's past experience in organizing county, district, and state contests. The Grundy County Farm Bureau had started holding county contests in 1926, hosted the state contest that same year, organized the 1927 Iowa preliminary state contest, and regularly sent its champion corn husker, along with a contingent of fans, to state and national contests. Planning for the national contest began in 1929 when Wallace asked County Agent Lou Plager if he thought the county would want to host the contest. Plager put the question to a group of Grundy Center businessmen who in turn asked the Community Club which agreed to supervise the local aspects of the contest.[14]

William E. Drips, corn husking editor of Wallaces' Farmer, worked closely with the Grundy Center Community Club and the Grundy County Farm Bureau in making contest arrangements. The Community Club's executive committee formed sub-committees on entertainment, police, refreshments and concessions, decorations, officials, publicity, sanitation, and transportation. As the contest date neared, Grundy County farmers joined committees to prepare wagons, teams, and equipment, and to build sanitary facilities and booths for the radio broadcasting crew, 4-H club members, gleaners, and information. Final contest preparations were coordinated by C. S. Macy, who replaced Plager as county agent in 1930.[15]

At the 1940 national contest held near Davenport, Iowa, the volunteer mobilization was mildly coercive. The central contest committee, the Scott

County Enterprises, Incorporated, recruited local volunteers through Agricultural Adjustment Act township committees. Using the AAA structure, organizers identified more than one thousand men as potential volunteers for the contest. The Scott County organizers requested that each adult male from rural school districts donate one or two days of service to contest work. Such a request coming from men in positions of community authority were difficult to ignore or refuse. Working as committees, volunteers publicized the upcoming contest, prepared the contest field, built food booths, arranged for electric power to be brought to the contest site, guarded the contest grounds as they were being constructed, built platforms and a scoreboard, found housing for important visitors, directed parking, protected the huskers from the crowd, and brought fire-fighting equipment out to the contest site to be available in case of an emergency.[16]

The necessity of using civic committees to carry out the myriad details associated with holding a state or national corn husking contest was clearly demonstrated in Ohio, where the contests were started by the agricultural college, which used state extension and research station employees to do the work related to holding a contest. In 1930, Ohio State College extension and experiment station personnel organized Ohio's first corn husking contest as part of its first annual Corn Harvest Field Day. Organizers in Ohio saw the contests as a popular way to promote modern, industrial-type agriculture. Each successive Field Day persuaded Ohio organizers that they needed to turn some responsibility for the contests over to local communities and permit them to reap the rewards of hosting a contest. The sense of shared ownership in the contests helped prepare Ohio for being unexpectedly chosen by the farm journals to host the 1936 national contest. Observers estimated that this national contest attracted between 140,000 and 160,000 visitors, possibly the largest crowd ever assembled in a rural area.[17]

Midwestern towns blended corn husking contests into their existing civic rituals and celebrations, such as county agricultural fairs, community picnics and homecomings, old settlers' reunions, shopping promotions, and Fourth of July, Halloween, and Armistice Day celebrations, thereby actively shaping the nature of their participation. The same groups prominent in the corn husking contests, such as the Chamber of Commerce, organized other public activities for a town. Civic celebrations offered towns the opportunity to express local pride and boosterism. Each town tried to surpass the activities planned by a neighboring town in order to attract more visitors and profit from their trade.[18]

County agricultural fairs provided a model for town involvement in farming practices. Town businessmen typically awarded premiums or prizes for superior accomplishment at fairs as a way to encourage agricultural improvement and promote town and farm relations. County agents encouraged progressive, scientific agriculture through the fairs by having farm youths exhibit their 4-H projects. Towns typically held their Fourth of July celebration on the main business street, featuring a patriotic ceremony, a parade with a brass band and decorated floats, boxed lunches, fireworks, and a dance.[19]

The Fourth of July celebration was usually planned by the local American Legion post, which also had charge of the Armistice Day ceremony. Fall festivals, jamborees, and shopping promotions, such as Dollar Days and sidewalk sales, likewise offered amusements and gave town merchants an opportunity to bring a crowd to the business district. In 1928, the Norton, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce sponsored an "Acquaintance Day" celebration which included drawings for prizes in many of the stores, free movies in the local theater, a three-hour concert at the bandstand by the courthouse, and the opportunity for a visitor to win five dollars by saluting a "mysterious stranger" with the words, "Good afternoon, I boost for Norton, do you?" The Norton Daily Telegram reported that approximately four hundred out-of-town cars were parked in the business district at one

point during the afternoon, thus making the event a promotional success.[20]

The corn husking contests grew increasingly elaborate as towns added parades, honorary banquets, festive decorations, and marching brass bands, to the event. The corn husking parade, for example, grew from the practical problem of moving the wagons and huskers to the field at the start of the contest in some orderly fashion. Early contest parades, like the 1926 national near Fremont, Nebraska, were relatively simple affairs held at the contest site. The huskers drew numbered lots for their husking lands, and the wagons lined up in that order to go to the field. As the parade of wagons passed each husking land in descending numerical order, the husker assigned there turned off from the rear of the parade. The parade was over when all the huskers were in position to begin the contest.[21]

In 1930, Norton, Kansas, combined the practical parade with the civic tradition of holding a ceremonial procession. The Norton Chamber of Commerce arranged the first town-sponsored corn husking parade, a spectacular affair consisting of twenty-five floats and thirteen marching bands from area towns. Norton's parade set an example, and all succeeding contest parades contained the same basic components--huskers riding in husking wagons, marching bands, and floats decorated by town groups. In spite of their general conformity, each parade was unique and reflected something of the character of the host community and the needs of the contest. In 1931, the parade began in the town of Grundy Center, Iowa, and proceeded along the main road out of town to the contest field, approximately one mile west of the town square. Parading through town helped solve the logistical problem of moving the horses and wagons from stables at the county fairgrounds on the east edge of town to the contest field, located one mile west of town. One of the more colorful parades occurred in 1933 when the Shrine Patrol from the Sioux City stockyards, decked out in their full costumes and regalia, rode their horses in the

national contest parade at West Point, Nebraska, and showed-off their horseback maneuvering techniques.[22]

After 1931, the growing crowds and the distant location of the contest fields made it inconvenient to hold a parade in town before the contest. Nevertheless, town committees continued to plan and direct contest parades. They recruited local brass bands and encouraged business and civic groups to build floats. Towns also began sponsoring corn husking queen contests in the late 1930s, and the queen and her court were often included in the parades. Beginning in 1932, tractors replaced horses for drawing the husking wagons in the parades and national contests. The use of tractors meant that town committees no longer had to locate enough horses to pull the wagons, but without horses parades lost some of their spectacle and excitement. The organizers of the 1932 parade may have anticipated the increased noise level from the tractors because they invited four large brass bands and a drum corps to march to their national contest parade. In 1938, the longest parade assembled for a national contest extended two miles around the contest field. The corn husking queen rode in the first wagon, followed by twenty-one wagons each holding a husking contestant, the entire procession being escorted by eighty American Legion wagon guards. Seven marching bands from the South Dakota State College, the University of South Dakota, nearby communities and high schools were interspersed between the wagons.[23]

Food preparation, serving, and clean up required a tremendous effort from host towns. Town organizers planned on every visitor eating at least one meal, perhaps more, while visiting for the contest. Beginning with some of the earliest contests, town groups sold food both at the contest site and in town. Women's church groups and auxiliary organizations played a major role in feeding the visitors. At the 1925 Illinois state contest near Hillsboro, approximately one hundred women from county churches and local aid societies sold fried chicken, pumpkin pie and coffee to contestants, officials, volunteers, and visitors. In 1926, women of the

Neighborhood Birthday Club sold refreshments at the Faribault County, Minnesota, contest, and in 1927, a women's food committee sold sandwiches, home-baked fruit pie, and hot coffee at the national contest near Fairmont, Minnesota. For some state and national contests, such at the 1926 national contest near Fremont, Nebraska, women's groups competed with men's groups for the food concession, but generally the demand for food at the contest sites was so strong that organizers welcomed participation by any civic, fraternal, or church group.[24]

Food stands at contests proved to be a profitable way for groups to raise money. Sometimes, more groups volunteered to run a food stand than were needed. In 1934, the Fairmont, Minnesota, Civic and Commerce Association had to limit the number of food concession stands to thirty. Unlike earlier contests where people ate standing up, the Fairmont American Legion and the Ladies' Aid society set up dining tents where customers could sit down while eating. The American Legion concession stand alone grossed four hundred sixty dollars. The Civic and Community Association received 25 percent of the net profits from food sold at the contest, which it used to help defray expenses. In 1937, the Marshall, Missouri, Chamber of Commerce sold space for food concessions at the national contest. When twenty of the fifty allocated spaces remained unsold one month before the contest, the concession committee threatened to sell space to non-county residents unless county groups bought all the available spaces.[25]

At the 1940 Ohio state contest, various ladies' aid societies, granges and town clubs operated food tents, feeding about thirty thousand people during a two day period. Contest organizers set standard prices for food so that all stands charged customers the same prices, and the director of county sanitation enforced health regulations. At the 1940 national contest, the food committee combined the various church and civic groups into one large, centralized operation, pooling workers, resources, and

profits. Approximately five hundred farm women and girls worked in four large food tents operated under the direction of the food committee.[26]

Town committees hosted banquets in conjunction with state and national contests to toast contest winners and to recognize out-of-town visitors. Typically, these formal dinners were held in large halls having kitchen facilities, such as an American Legion Hall or a high school gymnasium, and able to seat two to three hundred guests. In the early years, towns held their banquet after a contest, where farm journal editors presented prizes to the contest winners. Many huskers, however, opted to begin their travel back home immediately following a contest instead of staying for the banquet. The result was that on more than one occasion, a banquet was held without its heroes.[27]

In 1931, Grundy Center, Iowa, held its corn husking banquet at the American Legion building following the national contest. In attendance were the huskers, farm journal representatives, visiting dignitaries, contest officials, and reporters from the Associated Press, the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Daily News, and NBC radio. Reservations were required, tickets sold for one dollar each, and two hundred people attended. Legion Auxiliary women served the banquet food, and the top five winning huskers received their prizes, followed by program of short speeches.[28]

In 1932, host towns began holding their banquet the evening prior to the contests. This arrangement was more acceptable to the huskers and to other visitors who began to arrive in town a day or two early to prepare for a contest. In later contests, the ceremony of awarding the prizes to the contest winners was shifted from the banquet hall to the stage at the contest site so that prizes could be awarded immediately following the contest.[29]

In 1928, town groups began decorating the business district in conjunction with the corn husking contests when the merchants of Galva, Illinois, adorned their streets with corn stalks and colored lights for

the state contest. The following year, 1929, Platte City, Missouri, merchants followed suit, using corn to decorate their streets, the courthouse yard, and retail stores for the national contest. One Platte City businessman constructed a large arch of corn stalks over the main street to welcome visitors. A committee decorated the entire three blocks of the business section, including light posts, awning supports, display windows, and store fronts, on both sides of the street. Other towns quickly adopted the practice, and decorating for state and national contests became part of the contest ritual.[30]

Crowds did not always respect town decorating efforts. In 1934, Fairmont, Minnesota, farmers loaned merchants shocks of corn for decorating the business district, but the crowd destroyed the decorations by shredding the stalks, tearing off the ears, and grinding the corn underfoot. Groups of revelers were reported to have whacked corn stalks against telephone poles and thrown cobs at each other in mock battles. Town residents were shocked by the random destruction of the crowd; the Fairmont Civic and Commercial Association reimbursed the farmers for the damaged corn.[31]

Town committees cooperated with farm journal editors to entertain visitors at the contest site. Prior to 1926, corn husking crowds had found their own amusements during the two or three hours required by judges to compute the scores and determine the contest winners. During the wait, some of the crowd probably grew impatient and left, but those who stayed milled around, visiting with other spectators. Sponsors soon introduced activities to keep the crowd occupied during the lull, especially local musical talent. Music played a central role at the contests because practically every midwestern town supported some sort of municipal or high school band.[32]

The 1926 national, held near Fremont, Nebraska, was the first contest to feature organized entertainment; the Corn Belt Quartet sang and a community brass band played familiar songs. Nebraska Farmer editor Samuel

McKelvie encouraged the crowd to entertain itself with tug-of-war, women's chicken calling contest, and horse-shoe pitching, but the rope broke prematurely in the tug-of-war, only five women offered to demonstrate their chicken calling skills, and horse-shoes were canceled due to the cold weather. In 1934, the entertainment committee arranged a hog-calling contest, a wrestling match, a tractor race at the county fairgrounds, and a drum corps performance for national contest visitors.[33]

Radio broadcasts of state and national contests made towns self-conscious of their amateur talent and prompted them to either hire semi-professional musicians or persuade them to appear free of charge. In 1924, Clifford Gregory brought radio station WLS performers from Chicago to the Illinois state contest. In 1929, the Fort Leavenworth Post Band played and sang for the crowd. In 1931, national contest organizers arranged for the more polished Coe College Band from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to play for the radio audience instead of the county band. At the 1934 Minnesota state contest, the American Legion Post Kibitzer Band of Owatonna, "one of the most popular groups entertaining in southern Minnesota with accordions and harmonicas" put on its show for the crowd and radio audience.[34]

In the 1930s, towns added Native American encampments to the continually expanding list of town-sponsored contest activities. In 1933, organizers of the national contest near West Point, Nebraska, arranged for a group of Winnebago Indians to perform a pow-wow and a dance for contest visitors. In 1938, sponsors of the South Dakota national contest brought in a group of Ogalala Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation to set up tepees in a mock Indian village. The 1939 national contest in Kansas featured Native Americans from the Haksell Institute, who wore their full tribal costumes to the contests. The Native Americans set up three tepees, one to serve food, the second to display arts and crafts, and the third to portray their typical home life. The 1940 national contest near Davenport, Iowa, boasted a contingent of twenty Mesquakie from Tama County, Iowa. Headed by Chief Poweshiek, the Mesquakie put up three tepees and a

wickiup. The Mesqaukie performed war and ceremonial dances for the crowd and wore their tribal costumes.[35]

Even though towns sponsored corn husking contests during the worst years of the Depression, business and community groups were well rewarded for their efforts; state and national contests had a positive impact on local economies. Towns near the contest site enjoyed increased retail sales, restaurant business, and hotel receipts during the contests. In 1932, the stores in Galva, Illinois, extended their business hours during the evenings of the week prior to the national contest. Grocers, meat suppliers, and bakeries enjoyed tremendous sales to groups preparing contest food. In 1933, wholesalers in West Point, Nebraska, sold twelve hundred pounds of meat and twenty thousand buns to food stand operators. The editor of the West Point Republican wrote that the direct benefit to the town would be that many people would come from other states and leave a few dollars of new money in the county.[36]

Merchants and retailers in Fairmont, Minnesota, reported heavy business during the 1934 national contest. Restaurants and hotels in a fifty to seventy-five mile radius were crowded all day; billiard halls and meat markets reported their best business of the year. Clothing, department, and variety stores reported trade equivalent to "a big Saturday." Theater business equaled that of the Fourth of July. Many businesses stayed open during the contest itself. The editor of the Fairmont Sentinel estimated that if every visitor spent one dollar in Fairmont and the surrounding towns, it would mean seventy-five thousand dollars in new money to the area.[37]

During the 1939 national contest, the merchants of Lawrence, Kansas, sold food, lodging, and supplies to reporters from various media outlets, including the Associated Press, the United Press, the Kansas City Star, and Acme Telephoto. Other customers included visiting delegations from prospective host towns, state food inspectors, equipment salesmen, machinery operators, and service mechanics connected with the machinery

demonstrations and displays at the contest site. Also in 1939, exhibitors hired local crews to build the contest city, and they began buying supplies from local lumber yards two weeks prior to the contest. The crews built camera platforms for the newsreel companies, the radio broadcast booth, tent floors, the central stage, and restroom facilities. The John Deere Company spent almost four hundred dollars in Lawrence on lumber, paint, fuel, and food, and employed nine local men on the project. Kansas University brought in at least five carpenters and two laborers who spent two and a half days building booths for the University's "Resource-Full Kansas" display.[38]

Gasoline and oil stations within a relatively large radius around the area enjoyed an immense business from the automobiles being driven to the contest. During the 1930 national contest in Kansas, service stations had to close because they ran out of gas. Contest exhibits and demonstrations required so much fuel to run the farm equipment at the 1939 national contest that it was delivered to the contest site by tanker trucks.[39]

By the late 1930s, towns became more business-like about handling the contest details. For the 1937 national contest at Marshall, Missouri, the Chamber of Commerce concession committee awarded exclusive contracts to area food wholesalers. The committee negotiated contracts with Armor and Company for meats, Continental Baking for bread and buns, and Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company for paper items, coffee, candy, and other grocery items. The committee set a standard price for all food supplies, and concession operators placed their own orders and settled their accounts separately.[40]

By the late-1930s, the national contests had became too large for part-time, volunteer direction, so towns groups began forming special corporations to supervise all the activities associated with the national corn husking contests and to assume responsibility for any liability. Increasingly, the time involved in hosting a state or national contest spanned several years, beginning with a petition to the state's leading

farm journal for permission to be the host town and ending with the final settlement of accounts months after the contest. For the 1938 national contest, a group representing the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce formed Community Enterprises, Incorporated, to conduct the business of putting on the contest. For the 1940 national contest, organizers in Davenport, Iowa, formed Scott County Enterprises of Iowa, Incorporated, to handle the business affairs arising in connection with the contest. This organization represented the interests of several local groups, including the Scott County Farm Bureau, the Scott County Farmers Union, and the Davenport Kiwanis Club.[41]

All towns that hosted state and national contests faced similar problems related to maintaining order. Some problems were met by creating systems which imposed order, such as parking, traffic, and physical security. Other problems, such as public intoxication, petty theft, and rowdiness were discouraged through admonishment and law enforcement. Outside agencies assisted towns when the situation grew beyond their ability to control and direct it.

Although host towns were not responsible for law enforcement outside their city limits, they nevertheless felt that maintaining order was their responsibility and had a direct impact on town image. Disorder suggested that a community lacked control over disruptive forces, that it was not efficient, cooperative, or progressive. A certain element of the crowd, however, resisted the passivity desired of them, and instead became unorganized participants. Like Fourth of July celebrations, crowds sometimes treated a corn husking contest as a break from their routine and as an opportunity to release pent-up emotions through competitive rivalry and general rowdiness.

In part, the disruptive actions of the crowd derived from their desire to see the contest, which was really only possible by going out into the contest field. Only a handful of contest fields were situated so that crowds could look down onto the field from a hill. The 1934 national

contest at Fairmont, Minnesota, afforded a sloping hill on the east side of the contest field, which made a natural amphitheater. Visitors were encouraged to sit on the hillside and watch the contest without going into the field. The 1935 national contest held near Fowler, Indiana, had a similar observation hill next to the contest field for visitors to use.[42]

Rising attendance contributed directly to rising disorder, and towns found it difficult to keep disagreeable visitors away. Petty crime became ccmmonplace at the national contests in the 1930s, especially the stealing of purses and wallets. At the 1937 national contest, local officials brought in help from the Chicago Police Department and the Illinois State Bureau of Criminal Investigation to identify suspicious-looking activity. At that contest, twelve men were arrested on suspicion of being pickpockets and charged with vagrancy. They came from the cities of Chicago, Cincinnati, and Toledo. Prior to a national or state contest, local officials warned visitors of the possibility of pickpockets while assuring them that strong action would be taken to protect all honest visitors.[43]

The beginning of the contest was an especially difficult time for the police forces, as the crowd rushed into the field, damaging corn and impeding wagons, officials, gleaners, and huskers. One early instance of visitors breaking down corn and crowding up too close to the contestants occurred at the 1923 Iowa contest. In 1924, Illinois and Nebraska crowds "ran wild over the field," breaking down corn stalks and crowding too close to the huskers. Prairie Farmer editor Clifford Gregory was so appalled by the lack of decorum at the contests that he published a set of contest rules for visitors which outlined appropriate behavior and stressed respect for the farm owner's property. Despite the gentle suggestions, visitors continued to misbehave. In 1928 in Indiana, the crowd became unruly, swarming into cleared areas and closely following their favorites. Popular huskers suffered the most from the crowd, who simply wanted to glimpse a champion. In preparation for the 1937 national

contest held in Missouri, the editor of the [Marshall] Daily Democrat-News pleaded with readers to cooperate with contest official and keep out of the corn.[44]

Town groups relied mostly on local donations and the work of volunteers to conduct the contests and never expected to recover all their contest-related expenses. They strongly objected to outsiders profiting from their efforts, yet they faced difficulty in keeping entrepreneurs who had not contributed to the community effort, from profiting. The local press sometimes chided farmers who charged visitors for parking in their fields located near the contest site, as happened at the 1934 national contest near Fairmont, Minnesota. Souvenir sellers and itinerant peddlers were likewise troublesome to organizers who not only resented the siphoning-off of money from the community pocket, but who wanted to project a wholesome reputation for the contests that would place them above a carnival atmosphere. Nevertheless, undesirable elements did filter in. At the 1938 national contest near Sioux Falls, South Dakota, officials detained fifteen peddlers for questioning on the matter of selling pennants, trinkets, and novelties to visitors. One of the peddlers reported that he made his living following events which attracted large crowds.[45]

The most daunting police job, however, was directing traffic and parking. At many of the early contests, chaos had resulted from the lack of a parking plan; sponsors simply designated a parking area and let drivers park where they would. By 1928, towns systematized parking by using sheriff's deputies direct drivers to specific parking spots. Deputies began to direct contest traffic after minor accidents became common. Impatient drivers exacerbated the situation by trying to pass cars in front of them, only to realize that there was a traffic jam ahead. In Indiana in 1928, fifty uniformed American Legion men, assisted by the state police, took charge of marshalling the grounds and directing the parking.[46]

Towns lobbied state agencies for help in controlling crime and traffic. State highway patrol departments devised methods for easing the traffic congestion. In 1936, the Ohio state patrol used short-wave radios to reroute traffic as needed. In 1937, the Missouri Highway Patrol, the National Guard, and county law enforcement officials implemented a traffic routing plan to direct cars into two large parking areas adjacent to the contest site. At the 1939 national, the Kansas highway patrol designated one-way roads around the contest field so that two lanes of traffic could move in one direction without interference from one-coming cars.[47]

The nation followed the corn husking contests, listening to coast-to-coast radio broadcasts from the husking field, reading accounts of the contests in state and national papers and seeing the accompanying photographs transmitted to pressrooms by wire, and by watching contest newsreel films in theaters. For the national contests, town organizational efforts and progressive practices received favorable review. In 1934, the Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home reported, "the local folks did a splendid job of arranging for the event and handling the crowd. . . . the contest went off without a hitch, due largely to the preliminary organization work of the local committees and the fine cooperation of the 100-odd local officials."[48]

Competition complimented the cooperative nature of boosterism. Towns competed with each other to host state and national contest, enthusiastically expending time, energy, and expense to make their contests successful. Boosters recognized the potential of a contest to lift their town to national prominence. The sense of having a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to demonstrate the efficiency of midwesterners and their cooperative spirit shaped community action.

Town organizers assessed their efforts in the days and weeks following state and national contests, and gave themselves a pat on the back: attendance figures were higher than the previous year, traffic routing plans had eased congestion; civic and church concessions provided enough

food for everyone, public order was generally maintained, and the town presented a positive, modern, organized image to the watching and listening nation. After visiting the 1941 national contest, Illinois Governor Dwight H. Green congratulated the residents of La Salle county for their success in organizing the contest.[49]

At the time of the 1941 national, the corn husking contests seemed to be firmly entrenched as an annual midwestern fall celebration and their continuation seemed indefinite. The contests had the ability to unite the commercial aspect of small town and rural culture with attributes of modern industrial culture. Towns benefitted immensely from the contests, not only financially, but also psychologically, as the contests allowed them to demonstrate their organizational abilities and progressive nature. In July 1942, however, the farm journals canceled the corn husking contests for the duration of World War II as part of a national effort to conserve gasoline and rubber tires. Although they were not resumed after the war, the contests played an important role during the 1920s and 1930s of projecting a progressive image of midwestern towns.[50]

Notes

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49. [La Salle] Daily Post-Tribune, 4 November 1941.

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GENDER ROLES IN CORN HUSKING

Participation in the corn husking contests fell generally within existing gender roles and reflected the sexual division of work in the early twentieth-century Midwest. As industrial culture became more pronounced in rural life, ideas about proper gender roles on farms began to include values associated with industrialism. The corn husking contests help reveal the pervasiveness of industrial values in gender roles for rural men and women. Men's roles in the contests were an extension of the work required of them in industrialized agriculture. Men planned, organized, managed, and supervised the corn husking contests at national, state, and local levels. They prepared the contest fields and planted special demonstration plots. During contests, they delivered, demonstrated, and operated the farm machinery; men controlled the crowds, directed traffic, arranged banquets and parades, computed the scores, drove the wagons, and husked the corn. Champion male huskers husked in a machine-like manner, with speed, accuracy, consistency, and thoroughness. Most rural midwestern women could husk corn, some better than an average male husker, but women were generally prohibited from entering the contests organized by the farm journals. Instead, women participated mainly by preparing and serving food and by cheering for husbands and sons in the contests.[1]

Farm journals did organize some husking contests for women, but usually as an added attraction to a state or national men's contest. More often, town groups organized the women's husking contests. During the 1930s, many town groups sponsored a corn husking queen contest instead of a women's corn husking contest. Lacking the resources available to the farm journals, town groups turned to the women's beauty contest as something that was fairly simple to conduct. In sponsoring beauty contests, towns were following a larger national trend of civic-sponsored beauty pageants, which began with the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1919. Towns sponsored women's husking and queen

contests as booster activities, sometimes in conjunction with a men's corn husking contest, but not always. The beauty queen contest rewarded women's social attributes over their labor skills.

At state and national corn husking contests, agreement on proper roles for women was hindered by competing ideas about the nature of farm women's work in industrial society. On one hand, twentieth-century farm women expected to continue their productive roles on farms despite mechanization and declining labor requirements. On the other hand, proponents of industrialized agriculture, such as the farm journal editors and county-extension agents, urged farm women to direct their activities toward making the farm home more comfortable and attractive, believing that if women were relieved of the drudgery of heavy labor they would become more sympathetic to farm life and less likely to urge the family's move to town. Home demonstration agents, for example, encouraged farm families to acquire labor-saving technology, such as washing machines, refrigerators, and electric lighting in order to improve their quality of life. These competing ideas allowed a range of roles for farm women, roles which incorporated aspects of both production and consumption. In corn husking contests, this range of women's roles became apparent.[2]

Advocates of progressive agriculture, with its centralized marketing, efficiency studies, active extension service, and labor-saving machinery, discouraged women's corn husking contests because they made a positive public statement about women performing physical labor. The image of women husking corn conflicted with the progressive-industrial view of women performing only light to moderate household labor. Henry A. Wallace followed the progressive idea that women's work on the farm should be lightened and relegated to the domestic; the fields were no place for women, according to Wallace, who regarded corn husking as a man's sport, an extension of husking as man's work.[3]

At the end of the corn husking contest era, women's work roles on Midwestern farms combined both production and consumption. Local, town-

sponsored, women's corn husking contests reflected the more realistic experiences of farm women as producers. In state and national corn husking contests, however, women were used increasingly by male organizers to fill the symbolic role of queen. The queen, like the male hero, represented an ideal for the entire group to aspire to emulate. The corn husking queens were typically unmarried, under age twenty-five, and from rural backgrounds. They were valued for their physical attractiveness, charm, moral virtue, and skill of self-promotion, not for their occupational achievements, and certainly not for the amount of corn they could husk during a contest. The corn husking queens represented the commercial vision of rural women in industrial society.

Wallace's ideas about gender roles did not necessarily reflect farm practices; he tended to overlook the fact that many midwestern farmers were essentially laborers. In his columns in Wallace's Farmer, he attempted to get Midwestern farmers to think of themselves as middle-class producers, not as laborers. During the mid-1920s, his editorials and stories in the pages of Wallaces' Farmer celebrated a small minority of farmers who used innovations in management and technology, making them more managers rather than workers. His vision for rural society rested on the idea of an middle-class of male capitalist producers in which adult females, as wives and mothers, supported this society through the domestic arts. The idea of women laboring in a corn field undermined his vision. Wallace's ideal stood in sharp contrast to actual rural society. Farmers filled several economic classes, from landless laborers to prominent landowners who followed the latest scientific farming methods. The men who entered the corn husking contests typically fell somewhere between the two polarities. They lived and worked on family farms, they relied on family and hired labor during critical time of the crop year, and their wives often joined them in harvesting corn, as well as in other farm tasks.

The popularity of the corn husking contests derived, in part, from the eagerness of huskers to compete against each other. Many huskers enjoyed a

reputation of being a fast husker and wanted to test their skill against other reputable huskers. A certain element of pride and a desire for recognition prompted many men to enter the contests. Corn husking contests gave male participants an opportunity to show-off their brute strength and power, and in the process, "validate their masculinity." Ray T. Kelsey writing in the Ohio Farmer characterized the contests as "a real test of a man's ability, stamina, and courage to husk corn at top speed for 80 minutes." Experience, ability, and ambition were identified as important qualities for a man to posses in order to win a contest.[4]

Champion huskers found that training for contests increased their chances to win. Training revolved around practice, regular sleep, and diet. Some huskers took special care of their diets, eating only certain foods while in contest training. Huskers often liked to arrive early for a contest, the day before if possible, so as to get a good night's sleep. Orville Welch, perennial Piatt County, Illinois, champion and 1931 national champion, trained for contests by picking between one hundred ninety and two hundred bushels of corn a day in the weeks before a contest. Most huskers simply picked their own corn, either against the clock or competing against a father, brother, or hired man. In 1940, Illinois champion Ecus Vaughn prepared for the upcoming state contest by picking between one and two hundred bushels of corn every day for two weeks prior to the contest. The final week before the contest, Vaughn tried to create the contest situation as much as possible and only husked for eighty minutes each day, but at top speed.[5]

The widespread popularity of the contests rested on the interest of rural people who closely followed the contests. Corn husking was something practically everyone knew how to do; it was part of the annual experience of rural midwesterners. Practically all rural residents, male and female, had personal experience against which to measure contestants performances and could appreciate the feats of the fastest huskers, having some idea of their own husking speed. The men who won state and national contests were

an elite group who achieved something beyond the capabilities of the average farmer; champion huskers became heroes to rural people. The Nebraska Farmer pointed out that during corn picking time, the main topic of rural conversation was the number of bushels that a skilled worker could husk. Men such as Fred Stanek of Iowa, Layton Roberts of Missouri, Carl and Elmer Carlson of Iowa, Simms of Nebraska, Hanson of Minnesota, Theodore Balko of Minnesota, Elmer Williams of Illinois, became familiar names to Midwesterners who followed their careers through radio and print.[6]

In 1933, the editor of the Meadville Messenger described the huskers in the state contest in terms of admiration. "Those bronzed men of iron muscle and splendid physique justified the interest shown in them and never did a warrior bend to the task with any more determination. It was, indeed, a battle, with the weapons with which they had trained a lifetime. Theirs was a battle between producers, and following them and urging them on to victory were the ones who shared the fruits of their toil and for the most part helped produce."[7]

Unlike most other agricultural contests, the corn husking contests placed men at the center of the outcome. The question was not how much milk a herd of cows could produce, how much weight a steer could gain. The question was how much corn can a man husk? Man became the hero. Corn and weather were very important, of course, but in any particular contest, all huskers were under the same set of circumstances. Only the best among them would emerge from the pack.

Champion huskers were heroes to midwesterners because of their husking abilities, but in their private lives, they seemed quite average. Huskers were farm owners, renters, and hired men who established residency in a particular geographic location. They were typically married to women from farming backgrounds and had young children living at home. The best huskers were physically fit, in good health, and worked hard. Most of the huskers ranged in age from their early twenties to their late thirties. In

the media, they appeared humble and had few words to say about their husking feats; they let their actions speak for them. Theoretically, the huskers participated in the contests to test their manhood, not for fame and riches, although they received a cash prize and became well-known.

Although the contests was strictly non-profit events based on cooperation among agricultural and town groups, for some huskers, the contests provided a money-making opportunity. Wallaces' Farmer corn husking editor Arthur S. Thompson wrote that as the huskers began to get more and more national publicity, the champions received offers for the use of their name for promotional purposes. Most huskers resisted such commercialization of themselves, but enough yielded that some farm papers finally required that all contestants sign a pledge against commercial endorsements. Several champion huskers ignored their pledge and attempted to cash in on their fame, even though doing so violated the spirit of the amateur competition. Obviously, these huskers did not have the same attitude toward husking as "authentic rural recreation" as did Henry A. Wallace, who viewed the corn husking contests as an amateur sport.[8]

Any husker who sponsored a commercial product or participated in an exhibition contest for profit could be barred from all Standard Farm Paper contests, but many huskers endorsed products and entered exhibitions anyway. In the late-1930s, the DeKalb Agricultural Association sponsored an annual husking exhibition known as the Husking Kings Sweepstake, to which it invited past national corn husking champions. In 1937 the contest was held in DeKalb, Illinois, and the following year it was held in Fred Stanek's hometown of Fort Dodge, Iowa. Stanek won the contest the first year, besting nine past champions who had entered; Carl Seiler won the second year, the best of eight past national champions. Of the farm journals, Wallaces' Farmer, the Farmer, the Nebraska Farmer, and the Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze refused to publish advertisements which featured huskers who had gained name recognition through the contest system, but the Prairie Farmer and the Ohio Farmer often used huskers in

ads. The Ohio Farmer, for example, ran photographs of Walter Olson, the 1929 national champion and Harold Holmes, the national runner-up in an advertisement for the New Idea Two-Row Corn Picker, a "World's Champion with a Record that has Never Been Beaten."[9]

Huskers who turned commercial did so only after they had won a state or national contest. Some, like Piatt County husker Ecus Vaughn winner of the Illinois championship in both 1939 and 1940, waited until he won the national before he endorsed merchandise. Slim Pitzer of Indiana was ready to endorse products as soon as he won the 1939 national championship. In 1940, Vaughn and Pitzer appeared together in an advertisement in the Prairie Farmer for Veedol Tractor Oil. Vaughn was allowed to defend his title in 1940, but Pitzer retired. Pitzer continued his endorsement of merchandise in the pages of the Prairie Farmer, endorsing products such as Funk's G Hybrids and Union Leader smoking tobacco.[10]

Many huskers were perennial winners in county, state, and national contests. Fred Stanek, from Fort Dodge, Iowa, winner of an unprecedented four national championships, began his contest career in 1926 by winning the Iowa state contest and the national contest held at Fremont, Nebraska, five days later. Stanek developed a reputation as the epitome of good husking with a straightforward, no frills style. Stanek picked practically every ear from the stalks, left few gleanings, and almost never missed the bangboard. His husking was so rhythmical, smooth, and apparently effortless that observers remarked that it seemed as if he was not working nearly as hard as the other huskers.[11]

During the 1930s, Ted Balko, a farmer from Redwood County, Minnesota, dominated that state's contests. Balko began his husking career in 1930 when he won his county contest and advanced to state. Considered a dark horse, Balko surprised practically everyone except his entourage by winning the close contest, in which only four pounds of corn separated the top three contestants. Balko won the Minnesota corn husking championship a total of six times between 1930 and 1938. Not any less amazing, Balko won

the national championship twice during that period, in 1934 and again in 1938. After winning the national in 1938, Balko quit the amateur circuit and became an exhibition husker when he entered the Armistice Day contest at Fort Dodge, Iowa.[12]

Ted Balko's record of six state championships was matched only by Richard Anderson of South Dakota, who held that state's husking title almost continually from 1932 through 1938. Unlike Balko, however, Anderson never won a national contest. Several other states had a husker like Balko or Anderson who dominated contests for a given period of time. Indiana husker Lawrence Pitzer won his state crown five times, four consecutive years from 1932 to 1935, and in a come-back in 1939. The come-back was especially rewarding to Pitzer and his fans because in that year he went on to win the national title.[13]

The drought in the western corn belt during the mid-1930s helped the record of a few huskers. Kansas husker Lawrence House reigned as champion five times from 1933 to 1939, but he merely continued his reign from the previous year in both 1934 and 1936 when no state contest was held due to the drought. In Missouri, Layton Roberts was the top husker during the 1930s, winning four state contests from 1931 through 1937. The 1936 title carried over from 1935 because no contest was held in Missouri in 1936 because of the drought.[14]

Unlike the states above, the state championships in Iowa and Illinois were more hotly contested. Perhaps because of the wider dispersion of the corn belt in these states and the opportunity for good huskers to develop, Iowa and Illinois typically crowned a new champion each year. Evidence of higher levels of competition in these states is reflected in the fact that Illinois and Iowa ranked first and second in the total number of national championships its huskers won. Of the eighteen national contests, Illinois huskers won seven and Iowa huskers won six. Iowa had two repeating state champions, Fred Stanek, in 1926 and 1927, and Clyde Tague, in 1929 and 1930. In the Illinois state contests, Harold Holmes won three times

between 1927 and 1930; Elmer Williams won two consecutive years, 1925 and 1926; Ecus Vaughn won in both 1939 and 1940; and Irvin Bauman won twice, in 1935 and in 1938. Bauman also placed second in the 1935 national contest and first in the 1940 national.[15]

Many huskers won their county contests regularly. Earl Speece had won the Marion County, Ohio, standing corn contest eight times by 1940. Simon Oltman from Woodford County, Illinois, entered twelve of the county's thirteen contests and won six times. After winning the state contest in 1934, Oltman promised to quit competing, but entered again the next year despite his promise. Usually, only one husker dominated in a county, but Grundy County, Iowa, produced a group of four huskers, Ben Grimmius Jr., E. H. Hendricks, Clarence Bockes, and Joe Grimmius, who together participated in practically every Grundy County husking contest over the span of two decades, consistently advancing to state and national contests. Ben Grimmius earned special significance as one of three contestants present at Henry A. Wallace's first corn husking contest in December 1922. Grimmius won the Iowa state contest in 1924. By 1928, Grimmius had participated in every Iowa state contest except the one in 1926, when he helped to organize the district contest held in Grundy County.[16]

In 1928, E. H. Hendricks challenged Grimmius for domination in Grundy County contests. Their competition, which was encouraged by Henry A. Wallace, added excitement and interest to local and state contests. That year, both Grimmius and Hendricks advanced to the Iowa state contest, held near Red Oak in Montgomery County. Along with Grundy County agent Lou Plager, the Grundy County huskers travelled to Red Oak on a special train with the staff of Wallaces' Farmer and contest officials from Iowa State College. Fourteen huskers competed on that snowy, windy afternoon. Not long after the starting shot, a three-way race developed between huskers Ruel Harmon, Grimmius, and Hendricks. Grimmius and Hendricks had drawn lands next to each other and raced side-by-side during the entire contest.

After the scores were tabulated, judges found that only about two pounds of corn separated the net weight picked by Grimmius from that picked by Hendricks. Harmon won the contest, Grimmius placed second and Hendricks came in third. Even though they were fierce competitors in the field, nothing suggests that Grimmius and Hendricks continued that adversarial relationship off the field.[17]

The year 1929 was auspicious for Grundy County huskers. In that year, two more top scoring huskers emerged on the contest field: Ben Grimmius's brother Joe Grimmius won the county husking contest by husking twenty-nine net bushels of corn in eighty minutes, and Clarence Bockes captured second by husking twenty-eight net bushels. Ben Grimmius took third, and Hendricks placed fourth. Joe Grimmius and Clarence Bockes represented Grundy County in the state elimination contest on 4 November. The contest field was reported to be very uneven and unsatisfactory from the huskers' point of view. Joe Grimmius drew the land where the ears were very small in size, and even though he husked at least two entire rows more than anyone else, he ended up in eighth place because of the high number of deductions charged against him. Bockes placed fifth and earned a place in the state contest.[18]

The 1929 Iowa state contest, held near West Branch, was extremely close. Only two ears of corn separated first and second place, while a difference of less than five pounds of corn separated first and fifth place. Grundy County's Clarence Bockes placed second, earning a cash prize of fifty dollars and a place in the national husking contest, to which he had to pay his own traveling expenses. Cheering for Bockes at the state contests were his parents, his brothers Bert and Dale Bockes, Ben and Joe Grimmius, E. H. Hendricks, and Lou Plager. Plager accompanied Bockes to the national contest at Platte City, Missouri, where the husker placed sixth.[19]

In 1931, E. H. Hendricks won the Grundy County contest in front of an estimated crowd of one thousand people, the largest crowd to ever attend

the Grundy County contest. Ben Grimmius placed second. At the state meet, Hendricks captured second and a position in the national contest, which was to be held in Grundy County. What a thrill it must have been for Hendricks to represent the host county in the national contest. His presence made Grundy County residents especially interested in the national contest. Some of the champions from other states arrived several days prior to the national contest. One of these was Orville Welch from Piatt County, Illinois. Welch was considered a favorite to win. Welch practiced husking a few hours every day in different fields in the county in order to keep in shape and to get used to the kind of corn that was raised in Grundy County. Hendricks likewise spent a number of hours every day in the field the week before the contest and performed a short workout Friday morning before the contest.[20]

During the contest, a large crowd followed Hendricks, the local favorite, through the field. Hendricks took the lead early and held it to the end. The crowd pressed him closely, blocking his air and tramping down some of his corn. In spite of these distractions, Hendricks remained focused and threw at the average rate of fifty ears per minute. Another factor working against him was that he drew a land in the north end of the field where the corn was smaller and the yield lighter. The lands were six rows wide and eighty rods long; six rows had been husked out between each land before the start of the contest to allow room for the crowd to follow the huskers through the field. The corn stood up well, but was a bit shorter than normal. All the contestants husked two rows at a time; most of them nearly finished the entire six rows. J. J. Vanderwicken, editor of the Grundy Register, wrote that if Hendricks had drawn a land in the south end of the field he might have come in with the largest load. When time was called, Hendricks had husked more of his sixth row than had any other husker and, for a while, Grundy County residents hoped that he might be the new national corn husking champion, but, as it turned out, Hendricks

had too many gleaning and husk deductions to win the contest. Top honors were bestowed on Orville Welch of Piatt County, Illinois.[21]

In 1933, Grundy County's Clarence Bockes won the Iowa state championship, after having finished in ninth place the year before. He advanced to the national contest in West Point, Nebraska and placed eleventh. The following year, 1934, both Bockes and Hendricks advanced to the Iowa contest, but finished eleventh and seventeenth, respectively, and thus did not advance to the national contest. In both 1935 and 1936, Hendricks placed second in the Iowa contest, losing to the Carlson brothers, respectively, from Audubon County, who took turns winning both the Iowa and national contests for those years.[22]

From 1932 through 1936, Bockes, Hendricks, and the Grimmius brothers regularly claimed the top four spots in county contests. At the 1932 county contest, all four Grundy County huskers beat the national corn husking record of 35.8 bushels of corn in eighty minutes set in 1925. Bockes scored the highest, husking a net 38.5 bushels of corn in eighty minutes, but he was not able to repeat the feat at the Iowa state contest held in Jasper County corn. A few weeks later, the national record officially fell when Carl Seiler of Illinois husked 36.9 bushels of corn in eighty minutes in the national contest.[23]

The tenacity and accomplishments of the Grundy County huskers became well-known among rural Midwesterners. The huskers represented the best in corn husking and rural manhood. During the early 1930s, Grundy's champion huskers became known collectively as "The Four Horsemen." Both Ben and Joe Grimmius remained active in local contests through the 1930s, but neither ever again advanced to a state contest. Either Bockes or Hendricks always placed first in the annual Grundy County contest during this period. In 1937, a Grimmius did not enter a local contest for the first time since the contests had begun. Also that year, none of the Four Horsemen competed in organized corn husking contests. Younger men had replaced them in the field, but not in the memories of husking fans.[24]

In 1938, for the first time since the beginning of the contests, Grundy County had no representative at the state contest. Although Clarence Bockes, had won the county meet, he was barred from state and national contests because he had entered an "unauthorized contest" in Illinois, an exhibition for which he was paid as a professional. The 1941 Grundy County contest was a fitting, if unanticipated, end for that county's corn husking contest; the two county men who had participated in Henry A. Wallace's first corn husking contest organized and participated in Grundy County's last contest: Ben Grimmius, who placed second, and Lou Plager, who organized the event.[25]

Although the champion huskers became larger-than-life figures to their fans, most came from very ordinary backgrounds, and remained rooted in farm life and work after gaining celebrity status. For example, Layton Roberts of Chariton County, Missouri, won the Missouri state title five times by 1937, and was runner-up on three other occasions. Roberts, twenty-five years old in 1936, continued as a tenant farmer through his contest years. In 1937, Roberts operated a total of two hundred forty acres with sixty acres in corn. He was married and had two young boys, aged four and six years old.[26]

In 1935, when he won second place in the national contest, Irvin Bauman was single and farmed four hundred forty acres near Goodfield, Illinois, with a brother and sister. Two of his brothers regularly challenged him for the Woodford County husking crown. Five years later in 1940, when he won the national championship, Bauman was married with one small boy and rented a one hundred sixty acre farm in central Illinois.[27]

Practically all entrants into the husking contests were farmers. Ray Hanson, from Minnesota, who after winning the 1937 national contest at Marshall, Missouri, said he planned to return home to Bingham Lake, Minnesota, and "start in picking some more of my corn." Hanson had begun entering Cottonwood County contests as soon as they were organized in

1926. By the time of his national win, he had entered a total of twenty-six local and state contests, and five nationals.[28]

Bert Hanson, also from Minnesota but no relation to Ray Hanson, was an active corn husking competitor from Nicollet County, Minnesota, during the late 1920s. Hanson, who raised a variety of field crops and bred Polled Shorthorn cattle on his farm, won the county title four times from 1926 through 1929 and the Minnesota state contest in 1931. Hanson helped to stage contests as well as to compete in them. In 1926, the county contest was held on the H. A. Hanson farm, probably a close relative of Bert's. In 1928, as reigning champion Hanson was not required to compete in county contests to earn a place in the state contest, so he assisted the Nicollet County Farm Bureau and the county agricultural agent in putting on the county contest. In 1929, Berry Akers of the Farmer found Hanson on his farm plowing some pasture ground for next year's corn crop. Hanson confided to Akers that he had begun using a mechanical husker to pick his own corn, but expected to husk enough corn by hand to get in condition for the upcoming contest season.[29]

The 1928 Indiana state champion Cecil Miles of Warren County was a tenant on a two hundred eighty acre farm owned by Mrs. Cyrus Evans. Miles, who had grown up on a farm and who had husked corn as long as he could remember, raised about one hundred acres of corn each year. During the harvest season in 1928, Miles husked about one hundred bushels of corn each day.[30]

A small number of huskers were not full-time farmers. Some picked corn during the harvest to make extra money, some only husked as a hobby. The 1926 Indiana champion, Charles Budd from Jasper County, for example, was employed as a drainage tiler. The 1939 and 1940 Illinois champion husker Ecus Vaughn was an unmarried hired hand who lived in Henry County almost all of his adult life. The Missouri runner-up in 1937, Adolph Hughes of Holt County, worked as a manager in an apple orchard. Other than that,

Hughes fit the profile of a typical husker, being twenty-nine years old in 1937, and married with one four-year-old child.[31]

Champion corn husking often ran in siblings groups, perhaps because field work was performed in family groups. Several champion huskers admitted that they had learned the task from their fathers. Ben Grimmius Jr.'s father had held a local reputation as a fast husker. In 1922, Grimmius worked with his father and brothers husking their own corn, as well as that of their neighbors, earning between one hundred and two hundred dollars per husker each fall. In 1940, national champion Lawrence Pitzer, a married farmer in Fountain County, Indiana, speculated that the ability to husk quickly was inherited. Pitzer recalled that his father had been a very fast husker and that in his rural neighborhood some families carried a reputation as a group of fast huskers. Whether from genetic physical characteristics, or from the opportunity to informally compete in the family corn field, several groups of brothers performed well on the contest circuit. Theodore Balko, 1933 national corn husking champion from Minnesota, came from a family of seven boys, five of whom competed in the Redwood County contests. Strong competition existed among the brothers, especially when Edward, Ted's older brother, won the county championship in 1931, but was beaten by Ted in the state contest. In 1938, Ted Balko was married with two small daughters and farmed three hundred sixty acres with his father near Redwood Falls.[32]

Richard Anderson, husker from South Dakota recalled that he got started in the corn husking contests through his brother who had won the first county contest. Anderson decided to see if he could beat his brother, which he did, and proceeded to win the next five county contests in a row. In 1938, Anderson owned and operated a filling station on the paved road between Sioux Falls and Dell Rapids in South Dakota.[33]

Champion Kansas husker Lawrence House was single when he started entering county contests. In 1933, together with his father and brother, House farmed four sections of land with 1250 acres in corn. In 1940, House

was the reigning Kansas champion, but was upstaged by his younger brother, Kenneth, who won first place at the state contest.[34]

Perhaps the most famous husking brothers were Elmer and Carl Carlson from Audubon, Iowa. Of Scandinavian descent, the Carlson brothers farmed three hundred sixty acres with their father. Elmer entered his first county contest in 1935 and advanced all the way through the contest structure to become national champion that year. He declined to defend his title in 1935, wanting to give his older brother a chance to win, which bachelor Carl did, all the way to national champion in 1936.[35]

Although they competed against each other, family groups also cooperated in their farming operations, like Hartwick Olson, winner of the 1927 Knox County, Illinois, husking contest. Olson, who had been married six years and had a four-year old daughter when he won the contest, had himself been raised in a farm family of five boys and two girls. As adults in the late 1920s, all five brothers farmed near each other in Knox County, and their married sisters lived nearby with their own families. Olson raised corn and small grain on his two hundred seventy three acre farm, but he also shared work with his older brother Hilmer. Between them, the brothers had more than one hundred fifty acres in corn, which was expected to yield fifty bushels to the acre. Olson also raised hogs, sometimes fed cattle, and milked a herd of about ten Shorthorns and Guernseys. Olson's wife helped with the milking and boasted "I get through as quickly as he." Mrs. Olson kept several hundred laying hens. The money that she earned from chickens and eggs, together with the cream money, went toward paying off the mortgage. She said, "If it hadn't been for the chickens and the cows it would have been pretty hard picking these last two or three years."[36]

Most farm women accepted their gender role in the patriarchal structure of rural life, and of the corn husking contests, and found a space for themselves within both. According to rural historian Mary Neth, the farm family was the primary organizer of women's work. While males

were primarily responsible for the field work, early twentieth-century midwestern farm wives usually worked with small poultry, eggs, and dairy. Historian Dorothy Schwieder finds that in the early twentieth century, most farm women took care of the farm home and raised chickens; some farm women helped with milking and occasionally assisted with seasonal work like corn picking. When women husked corn, they were considered to be "just helping out," but from their comments, many women apparently enjoyed field work and took pride in performing the work "like a man." Neth explains, "Labor was a positive virtue for farm women," even when it was restricted by gender.[37]

The precise role of women in field work has been difficult to document because their historical record reflects their domestic work and family relations more often than their field work. Neth points out that the context of women's work on farms was shaped by their relationship to their parents or husband. The amount of women's participation in field work depended upon several factors in addition to the relations among family members, including the type of farm, the ethnic-cultural background of the farm family, and economic and social class. For instance, Neth found that the amount of field work performed by women on hog-livestock farms in the corn belt showed the widest range of involvement, from extremely to only minimally involved.[38]

Ethnicity of the farm family may have played a role in women's involvement in field work. Neth notes that a common observation among scholars is that immigrant women worked in the field more commonly than did their native-born counterparts. She further found that women of German, Irish, and mixed nationality were the most likely to work in the field, especially during the corn harvest. Henry A. Wallace noted that most of the early male contest winners were second-generation immigrants.[39]

A woman's relationship with her father or husband was a main determining factor regarding the possibility that she might work in the

farm fields, since the male head of the farm household usually directed the field work. Whether or not a young woman would work in her father's field might depend on the number of total children in the farm family, the number of male children, birth order, marital status, and the father's health. Young women in their mid-to-late teens who came from families with few or no male children probably spent considerable time working in farm fields. Married women with small children probably spent the least amount of time in farm fields, concentrating instead on child care, housework, and meal preparation. These women had to add corn husking to their other work responsibilities, as did Mrs. Margaret Otto of Livingston County, Illinois, who on one Saturday afternoon during the harvest of 1928 husked fifty-one bushels of corn and finished in time to prepare supper for the other huskers.[40]

Some women, whose husbands were deceased or otherwise indisposed, had total husking responsibility, such as Mrs. August Clippe of Brooklyn, Iowa. In 1922, Mrs. Clippe found it necessary to husk a thirty-acre field of corn by herself. Mrs. Clippe husked for seventeen days straight, three hours before noon and five hours in the afternoon every day. One day, she husked eighty-seven bushels; another day she husked forty bushels in just under three hours. In sum, she husked 1290 bushels of corn. Besides the husking, Mrs. Clippe kept up the family cooking and baking and cared for her two school-aged daughters.[41]

The economic situation of a farm family and the size of the farm and the amount of land in corn production also had an influence on women's field work. Wives of farmers who could afford to hire male corn huskers from the surrounding area probably spent less time in the field than wives of farmers who could not afford hired help. Neth found that, in general, women on farms of less than eighty acres were the most active in fields and barnyard while women on larger farms, of more than two hundred forty acres, were less active.[42]

Through the first half of the twentieth century, women were increasingly marginalized from American agriculture by their decreasing participation with land, the fundamental resource of agriculture, as farmers adopted mechanical technology. As the tractor-drawn mechanical corn picker replaced manual husking, the labor requirements of the farm were reduced. In turn, the demand for hired labor, as well as family labor declined. If women performed only house and poultry work, her active role in the farm operation would be diminished overall. Many labor historians argue that to replace skilled laborers with machines disempowers the worker, depriving him or her of the power that accompanies special abilities or knowledge. Although farmers did not adopt mechanical corn pickers to deliberately exclude women from field work, that was one outcome.[43]

Most farm and rural women participated in the corn husking contests in ways acceptable to agriculture industrialists. In supporting roles, women were welcomed as wives advancing their husband's endeavors, providing food to visiting crowds, and observing contests with their husbands. In one of the most self-sacrificing acts of support ever witnessed at a corn husking contest, Mrs. Hilmer Swanson accompanied her husband to the 1927 Nebraska contest just seven days after their marriage. Swanson, known as the "Honeymoon Husker," won the state meet, one hundred dollars in cash, and an expense paid trip for one to the Midwest husking contest in Minnesota, to be held the following week.[44]

During the 1920s, wives of corn huskers accompanied their husbands in order to coach them during the contest, pointing out ears missed, calling out times, and trying to clear away close spectators. During the 1928 Illinois contest, Walter Olson's wife followed him during the entire contest, coaching and calling out the number of ears he was picking per minute. Elmer William's wife did the same for him at the same contest. A rule change in the 1930s outlawed coaching.[45]

Wives of host farmers generally played a very minor role in the contests. The farm fields, not the farm home, was the central attraction for visitors. In a departure from the norm, the host's wife at the 1936 national contest in Ohio, Mrs. Alva Oyler, directed the preparation of meals for the thirty-eight husking contestants, serving a traditional Sunday dinner of roast beef, mashed potatoes, creamed turnips, beans, potato salad, chocolate and cherry pie, ice cream and coffee after the contest while the scores were being tabulated.[46]

In a few instances, women hosted a contest. The 1938 Ohio state contest was held on a farm owned by Miss Mary E. Johnston and managed by G. W. Putnam. The five thousand acre farm had one thousand acres in corn; the contest was held in a two hundred twenty-five acre field. The size of the farm and the presence of a full-time manager suggest that Miss Johnston played only a marginal role in the day-to-day-farming activities.[47]

The most controversial role for women at the contests was that of corn husker because it went to the heart of the question of the proper role for farm women within industrial agriculture. Farmers and families who saw the contests as farm work made fun, had no reason to oppose women's participation. Others like Henry A. Wallace who saw the contests as a combination of scientific experiment and manly sport that would improve farming efficiency, treated the women's contests as an absurdity, something out of its proper time and place.

Women's participation in the contests was constrained by the idea that a cooperative association of professional farmers could make agriculture competitive with industry. Progressives associated women's field work with individual/family-type agriculture and not with the commercial agriculture they envisioned for the future. For their part, midwestern farm women seemed surprised at the reaction of the journal editors, themselves seeing nothing strange or unfeminine in their request to participate. Most women huskers just wanted to get in on the competition and excitement of the

contests. When women attempted to husk in the contests as they helped husk at home, they were rebuked. Farm journal editors treated women's interest in the corn husking contests as ludicrous. They seemed surprised that women would even imagine themselves serious contenders.

An important factor in determining whether a women's contest would be included in a state corn husking contest was the attitude of the editor of the sponsoring farm journal. In some cases, a women's contest was simply a gesture of accommodation because after promoting the contests as authentic rural recreation, Wallace and the other journal editors found it difficult to completely prohibit women's contests, especially because the editors tried very hard to make the contests reflect actual husking conditions. Journal editors justified their reluctance to include women by expressing their concern for women's health and safety. Besides, they knew that the general level of competition served as a barrier to women. A few women attempted to enter the contests despite the odds, but were treated skeptically by the contest sponsors. When convinced of the women's sincerity, sponsors agreed to organize separate, but unequal, contests for the women.

The farm journal editors themselves were partly to blame for women's misunderstanding about the contests. In his effort to identify specific work roles by job title, Wallace had used gender neutral language in the contest rules. Words such as "contestant" "huskers" "driver" "gleaner" "judge" described participants. The rules did not specifically state that the contestants had to be male, but Wallace and the other journal editors had not expected women to enter. To them, the new gender division of farm work had already been made.

Farm journal editors could not imagine that farm women could actually be proud of their ability to husk corn. Yet farm women had earned neighborhood reputations as good huskers just as readily as men, and presumably, they stood just as ready to defend their reputation in the field. In 1923 for example, Kathryn and Merle Collister, daughters of Mr.

and Mrs. Thomas Collister from Larrabee, Iowa, were called the "champion female corn huskers of the state and nation" by their friends and neighbors. One day in particular, Kathryn husked one hundred six bushels and hauled it to the crib while Merle husked and hauled ninety-six bushels. The Des Moines Register described the sisters as "typical Iowa girls, being as much at home in the kitchen and parlor as their city cousins and possessing similar accomplishments. Picking corn is not new work for them. They are just out of their teens, are of athletic turn and are physically capable."[48]

Women spectators at the 1928 Illinois contest compared their own husking records while visiting among themselves. One group of women from Benton County was overheard praising the husking ability of their neighbor Mrs. Herman Bennett of Fowler, speculating that she could husk eighty bushels any day. Many farm women at the contest told of days spent husking beside their husbands, enjoying it, though the men often insisted the work was too hard for them. The Benton County group favored "a women's contest with women officials," saying that it would be great fun.[49]

Most farmers, unlike the farm journal editors, did not scoff at the idea of women corn huskers. Working beside wives, sisters, and daughters, male farmers understood the contribution that an extra worker made to the arduous task of husking corn. Male farmers did not publicly object to women's corn husking contests, and in several instances they encouraged women's husking. The 1939 Murray County, Minnesota, contest held at the Ted Ruppert farm featured a women's contest. Ruppert won the men's contest, and Mrs. Ted Ruppert won the women's contest. Also scoring high in the women's contest was Mrs. Joe Ruppert, possibly a sister-in-law, and Mrs. Fred Bremer. Another example of male and female huskers from the same family is that of twenty-four year old tenant farmer Chester Collins from Hardin County, who won the 1940 Ohio state contest. Collins' twenty-one year old wife, Luanna, was a former Logan County women's husking champion.

Besides his wife, Collins' brother, Edward, was also a Logan County champion husker.[50]

While the farm journals effectively limited women's participation in state and national contests, women found county contests to be more accessible. Women's participation in local contests depended on both the attitudes of men in the sponsoring organizations and the determination of the women themselves. In 1932, women in Coffee County, Kansas, were determined to participate in the local contest. The county agent arranged for ten women, who vowed that they were "not to be outdone by the men," to husk in their own contest. In this contest, each woman was given a bushel of snapped corn to husk, while the men contestants competed in standing corn. Some observers in the crowd of six hundred commented that the winner, Mrs. Joe Isch, might have beat some of the men in the field contest, if given a chance.[51]

In 1935, Ohio state contest organizers agreed to include a women's contest. To be eligible, women had to have won a county contest. At state, the idea that the women's contest was entertainment was reinforced by scheduling it during the scoring for the men's contests. Despite the contest's second-billing, the Ohio Farmer reported that the ladies' contest drew "a tremendous crowd." Ten county champions entered and "they made the ears fly" during the forty minute contest. The first place winner, Mrs. Charles Mills, from Paulding County, husked twelve bushels and seven pounds of corn, an amount "almost any man would be proud of."[52]

Women's state and national contests, unlike the more realistic county contests, were held mostly as entertainment. These contests were of two distinct types: fun and serious. The editor of the hosting farm journal set the tone for which kind of women's contest would be held at his state contest. In states such as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, where smaller, more diversified farms created situations where women were likely to work in the fields, women's corn husking contests seem to have been taken relatively seriously, both by the sponsoring farm journals and by

the women themselves. In the states further west, with larger fields and less diversity, such as Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota, the women's contests tended to be taken less seriously, and treated more as entertainment than as a reflection of actual working conditions. Arthur Capper and Samuel McKelvie, for example, favored the fun type of women's contest. Henry A. Wallace, on the other hand, approached most things seriously and carried that attitude over to the women's contests in Iowa.

Whether amusing or serious, one thing was certain--women competed to a different standard than did the men. Men and women never competed on an even standing, or in the same contest. Two sets of standards guaranteed that men's and women's work would not be directly compared. The two kinds of women's contests contained a common thread; both devalued the contribution of women to field work, one by making light of women's contribution, and the other by holding women's work to a different standard than men's. When the standard was to "work like a man," agricultural industrialists gave women little opportunity to prove their ability to meet the standard.

The fun women's contests were clearly for entertainment only and held scant resemblance to the men's contests. In these contests, women were often seated on chairs in a central location on the contest grounds. Officials brought them baskets of previously snapped ears of corn to husk. Typically, these contests lasted only a few minutes, and the women were expected to play the contest for laughs. In 1927, the Nebraska state contest featured one of the first fun women's contests. Publisher McKelvie had seventeen "office girls" from the Nebraska Farmer husk a small amount of corn while attired in their stylish street clothes. Another such contest occurred at the 1930 national, when Capper's Kansas Farmer seated women contestants in a tent on a raised platform from which they could be seen by the entire crowd. The women were given one minute to remove the husks from ears of snapped corn. Rules were "catch-as-catch-can," meaning

that almost anything would be allowed in removing the husks, including the use of teeth.[53]

Scattered criticism of this contest surfaced among the crowd, indicating the desire of women to compete using the same rules as the men. "Some of the ladies said they would have liked to have husked in the field instead of using snapped corn," reported the Kansas Farmer corn husking editor, adding that the remarks were, of course, "only in jest." One wonders if perhaps the comments might have been made by women who felt they were being patronized. The first place winner, Mrs. Marjorie Wiemers, had reportedly helped her husband husk four thousand bushels of corn at home the year before.[54]

Women such as Mrs. Wiemers had hands-on experience picking in standing corn and may have wanted to compare their abilities against other corn-huskers of either sex under actual conditions. The women who participated in corn husking contests clearly were proud of their ability, and were a bit resentful of attempts by contest organizers to belittle their contribution to farm work. Nevertheless, women huskers remained within the contest structure as organized by men; significantly, they did not attempt to form their own contest structure or even hold independent contests outside of male-created structures, just as farmers did not attempt to form or hold their own organized contests, but rather participated through the structure created by journal editors, state extension services, and civic businessmen.

Henry A. Wallace generally discouraged women's contests in Iowa, but when local groups insisted, Wallace made sure the contests were separate, yet serious, endeavors. In 1926, the first occasion of women wanting to enter a corn husking contest arose when three Clay County, Iowa, women indicated that they wanted to compete in the regular county contest. Probably acting on advice from Henry A. Wallace, local organizers planned a separate contest for the women. At the last minute, the contest had to be canceled on account of bad weather, however, the men's contest was held

as scheduled. Wallace's influence over the contest structure in Iowa kept the number of women's contests there to a minimum. Not until 1931, in conjunction with the national contest, did Wallaces' Farmer sanction a subsequent women's contest in Iowa. Wallace probably allowed the 1931 women's contest because Iowa was hosting the national contest that year, and Wallace may have wanted to include as many activities as possible in order to draw a large crowd. Another reason may have been that the Kansas Farmer had allowed a women's contest at the national contest the year before and thus had created a precedent.[55]

Despite his misgivings, Wallace approved of a series of women's contests for 1931, beginning with a Jasper County contest. Wallace insisted that the women's contest be held under the same rules and regulations as the men, with one modification. Wallace held that the strain of the eighty minute contest might injure the women's health, so their contest lasted only thirty minutes. Nine Jasper County women entered the "special husking race" in which they husked in the field from standing corn. Mrs. Lester Webb, of Farrar, Iowa, won first place. Mrs. Webb, along with seven other Iowa women, advanced to the women's state contest, held a few weeks later near Nevada, Iowa. The same rules prevailed as in the Jasper County contest. Mrs. Lloyd Halverson of Radcliffe placed first, followed by Flora Grimmius of Grundy County, a sister to Ben Grimmius. Just over a week later, the Iowa women participated in the national women's corn husking contest, which Wallaces' Farmer did not publicize, in conjunction with the national contest at Grundy Center, Iowa. Although the women's contests had attracted interest, Wallace remained unconvinced of the appropriateness of a corn husking contest for women. Consequently, Wallaces' Farmer declined to sponsor any further women's contests.[56]

During the late 1930s, state and national women's corn husking contests gradually disappeared from the organized contests. At the local and county level, however, women's contests continued under the sponsorship of male organizations. In 1939, a Douglas County, Illinois, 4-

H club sponsored a women's husking contest and a county farm advisors husking contest. The outcomes of the two contests were compared to determine the overall winner. Members of the 4-H club assisted in weighing, gleaning, and unloading the corn. Seven Douglas County women entered their thirty minute contest in standing corn. The women's winner was eighteen year-old Dorothy Hartman who had entered the contest at the last minute when one of the women contestants failed to show up. Hartman reported that her corn-picking experience was limited to husking the down rows created when "the men at home" opened a field with a mechanical picker. The farm advisors won the overall contest, each man bringing in larger loads than Dorothy Hartman. Of the men, the Scott County advisor netted the most corn in thirty minutes of picking, followed by the agents of Piatt, Edgar, and Ford Counties.[57]

During the late 1930s, Blockton, Iowa, held an annual women's corn husking contest in which the contestants husked from standing corn. In the 1940 contest, eleven women from a three county area in southwestern Iowa and northwestern Missouri, consisting of Taylor and Ringgold Counties, Iowa, and Worth County, Missouri, entered the contest. In 1940, Mrs. Carl Wyman of Maloy, Iowa, retained her title as the tri-county women's corn husking champion for the third consecutive year.[58]

Women's local corn husking contests were often held in conjunction with town booster events to attract crowds to town stores and businesses. As booster events, women's contests offered several attractions. First, they were something of a novelty even in counties where men's contests were popular. Depending on the type of contest chosen by a town, women's contests could be much simpler to organize, and typically required less space, equipment, and time. In 1933, for example, Brewster, Kansas, held a ladies corn shucking contest in the local theater. A large pile of corn was placed on the theater stage, and the ladies surrounded the pile with pegs and hooks in their hands. At a given signal, all the women began

husking from the central pile. When time was called, the woman with the biggest pile of the cleanest corn was declared the winner.[59]

In 1940, the Maquoketa, Iowa, Commercial Club sponsored a Jackson County women's husking contest in conjunction with its annual Fall Festival and Pancake Days. The contest was held in a field of standing corn. The male sponsoring committee had wanted an all-woman contest in which women would drive teams, glean, weigh, and judge the forty-minute contest, but not enough women volunteered for all the jobs, so the committee had to provide male drivers and gleaners. The editor of the Jackson County Sentinel recruited women for the contest by appealing to their husking ability, writing that several women in the county were known to throw more than one hundred bushels a day. Although the contest was limited to ten women, about twenty women expressed interest in entering.[60]

The contestants were aged between twenty and thirty-five years, and they wore regular work clothes for the contest. Total prizes equaled two hundred fifty dollars, and each contestant received a small amount of seed corn from one of the contest sponsors. The winner, Mrs. Albert Hinrichsen of Baldwin, was crowned Queen of the Lady Corn Huskers after husking thirteen bushels in forty minutes. The contest was staged on the P. H. Dell farm near Maquoketa. Town merchants hoped that following the contest, hungry spectators would make the short trip into Maquoketa for free pancakes, with syrup, butter, bacon, and coffee. The town hoped that it might attract as many as ten thousand visitors and potential shoppers to the festivities.[61]

Meanwhile, at the national and state husking contests, beauty contests began to replace women's husking contests. In these and other queen contests associated with festivals and town events, local merchants used young women to promote the community and to encourage business and trade. The corn husking queen contests were more popular in the western half of the Midwest, states where women's contests had been of the fun variety. Perhaps these small towns and rural areas in these states were more

prepared to have rural women step away from family work roles and into roles created for them by business promoters. The first corn husking queen contest was held in conjunction with the national corn husking contest at Marshall, Missouri, in 1937. Virginia Dennis, of Marshall, was named Queen of the National Corn Shucking Contest several months before the contest and used the time prior to the contest to travel throughout the Corn Belt in numerous goodwill trips to advertise the upcoming event. Queen Dennis was attended by eight maids of honor.[62]

Soon the queen contests became part of the contest ritual. In 1938, the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, organizers of the national contest also crowned a queen for the corn husking contest. As in the husking contests, South Dakota queen contestants advanced to the state level from county contests. Aspiring queens were required to be between eighteen and twenty-three years of age, to have actually lived on a farm, and to have been nominated by at least twenty-five persons from their county of residence. Fifteen young South Dakota women met all of these requirements and took part in the state contest. The contest winner was Venita Appley, twenty-two year-old unmarried teacher from rural Union County. In 1940, the Kansas corn husking queen contest was sponsored by the businessmen of the Washington Chamber of Commerce. All contestants were required to be single, not previously married, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. No connection with agriculture was required.[63]

Towns in the eastern part of the Corn Belt tended to choose queens in conjunction with town festivals, but not for the corn husking contests. In 1941, for example, Eureka, Illinois, in Woodford County, elected a Pumpkin Festival Queen. The same year, the town of Galva, Henry County, Illinois, crowned eighteen-year old Galva cafe waitress Dorothy Polansky its Corn Festival Queen, an event unrelated to the corn husking contests.[64]

As work roles changed with the infiltration of industrial agriculture into the countryside, those changes were reflected in the corn husking contests. Farm women's roles changed unevenly across the Midwest,

depending on the level of involvement of women in field work. Even so, women's roles changed more at the symbolic level than did men's. By the late 1930s, one prominent commercial model for rural women was the contest queen, who ascended her position because of her physical beauty, charm, and social accomplishments. The gender roles of rural men, on the other hand, were shaped by the increasing mechanization of agriculture, which encouraged men to perform labor in a more machine-like manner. In both cases, gender roles reflected the emerging values of industrial culture.

Notes

1. The definition of gender used in this paper comes from R. W. Connell, who defines gender as "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women" that help to define masculinity and femininity in a dynamic process, in Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), quoted by Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo, eds, Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Books, 1990), 11-12. Mary Neth, in "Gender and the Family Labor System: Defining Work in the Rural Midwest," Journal of Social History 27, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 563-78, argues that "labor was a positive virtue for farm women, even when it was restrictively gender-defined (569)." For an example of a farmer measuring his wife's field work against a man's, see Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 571.

2. For further discussion of the impact of industrialization on gender roles, see David Danbom, The Resisted Revolution: Urban American and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979), 62; Mary Neth, Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundation of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940 (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), 214.

3. Glenda Riley and Richard S. Kirkendall, "Henry A. Wallace and the Mystique of the Farm Male, 1921-1933," Annals of Iowa 48, nos. 1, 2

(Summer/Fall 1985): 32-55, argue that Wallace prescribed "traditional" gender roles for rural men and women in agriculture, that is Wallace "saw farm women as wives and helpmates in most cases (48), not as a potential source of field labor. Ellis Hawley writes that specialists in domestic science became new centers of authority, but lacked accountability, in The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 141.

4. Richard S. Kirkendall, "The Mind of a Farm Leader," Annals of Iowa 47, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 138-53; Riley and Kirkendall, "Henry A. Wallace and the Mystique of the Farm Male," 45; Ohio Farmer 28 November 1931, 5.

5. Leonard J. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards: Complete Digest of Corn Husking Records (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1975), 182; Galva News, 10 November 1932; 24 October 1940.

6. Nebraska Farmer, 28 November 1925, 6.

7. Meadville Messenger, 9 November 1933.

8. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 190.

9. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 231; Ohio Farmer, 5 October 1929, 12. The Stover Manufacturing and Engine Company, makers of stover hammer mills, corn shellers, and water tank heaters hired Harold Holmes, 1931 Illinois corn husking champion, and Orville Welch, 1931 national corn husking champion, to endorse its products in the Prairie Farmer, 7 November 1931, 31; 28 November 1931, 11. In 1936, after Adam Byczynsik of Bureau County, Illinois, set a new state husking record of 41.17 bushels in eighty minutes, he endorsed the Darling and Company's "Big Harvest" fertilizer which had been applied to the contest field during the spring and helped grow the contest corn, yielding over one hundred bushels per acre, Prairie Farmer, 21 November 1936, 29.

10. Prairie Farmer, 19 October 1940, 2, 15; 16 November 1940, 15.

11. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 18 November 1926.

12. Farmer, 15 November 1930, 3; Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 197-203; [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 4 November 1938.

13. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 202-203.

14. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 202.

15. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 201; Lafayette Journal and Courier, 9 November 1935; Prairie Farmer, 16 November 1940, 3.

16. Marion Star, 18 October 1940; Metamora Herald, 17 October 1941; Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards, 201; [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 15 November 1928.

17. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 8 November 1928; 15 November 1928. Wallaces' Farmer, 9 November 1928, 3.

18. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 31 October 1929; 7 November 1929.

19. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 31 October 1929; 11 November 1929.

20. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 29 October 1931; 13 November 1931, Section 2, 1.

21. Ohio Farmer, 28 November 1931, 5; [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 19 November 1931.

22. Wallaces' Farmer, 9 November 1935, 3; 21 November 1936, 3.

23. Lou Plager, "Grundy County, 1932" Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Extension Agents: Iowa, Cooperative Extension Service (Ames: Iowa State University, 1913-1968), 42, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: Iowa; Plager, "Grundy County, 1933," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 24; Plager, "Grundy County, 1934," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 23; Plager, "Grundy County, 1935," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 22; Plager, "Grundy County, 1936" County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 19. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 12 November 1932, 3; 26 November 1932, 9.

24. Plager, "Grundy County, 1934," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 23. The name "The Four Horsemen" paid homage to the four offensive linemen of the Knute Rockne's 1921 Notre Dame football team. The four football

players got their name when a sportswriter commented that the swift, unstoppable players reminded him of Rudolph Valentino's latest movie, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, see Tom Perrin, Football: A College History (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland and Company, 1987), 119-21. Plager, "Grundy County, 1937," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 16.

25. Plager, "Grundy County, 1938," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 20; Plager, "Grundy County, 1941," County Agents' Reports: Iowa, 25.

26. [Marshall Daily Democrat News, 3 November 1937; 5 November 1937, 1, 3.

27. Metamora Herald, 17 October 1941; Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 16 November 1940, 5.

28. [Marshall] Daily Democrat News, 5 November 1937, 3; [Minnesota] Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 16 November 1929, 5; Ohio Farmer, 20 November 1937, 2.

29. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 14 November 1931, 6; 10 November 1928, 7; 19 October 1929, 7.

30. Prairie Farmer, 10 November 1928, 3.

31. Prairie Farmer, 20 November 1926, 5; Lawrence Daily Journal-World, 3 November 1939; [Marshall] Daily Democrat News, 3 November 1937, 1. In 1996, Ecus Vaughn was living in Henry County, Illinois, and still liked to talk about the corn husking contests, according to Bob and Marcella Richards, operators of the Kewanee, Illinois, National Corn Husking Museum.

32. Wallaces' Farmer, 15 December 1922, 3; Lawrence Daily Journal-World, 3 November 1939; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 1 November 1934; Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 14 November 1931, 6; [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 4 November 1938.

33. Columbus Dispatch, 10 November 1936; [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 30 October 1938.

34. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 20 November 1933, 6; [Davenport] Democrat, 24 October 1940, 13.

35. Lafayette Journal and Courier, 9 November 1935; Columbus Dispatch, 11 November 1936.

36. Galesburg Register Mail, 5 November 1927, 2.

37. Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 563-64; Dorothy Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Community," Annals of Iowa 47, no.1 (Summer 1983): 104-15.

38. Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System, 564.

39. Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System, 563, 566.

40. Prairie Farmer, 17 November 1928, 10.

41. Des Moines Register, 9 December 1922, 10.

42. Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 567.

43. Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 570; Deborah Fitzgerald, "Farmers Deskilled: Hybrid Corn and Farmers' Work," Technology and Culture 34, no. 2 (April 1993): 324-43.

44. Nebraska Farmer, 19 November 1927, 3.

45. Galva News, 8 November 1928, 1.

46. Ohio Farmer, 21 November 1936, 12.

47. Ohio Farmer, 24 September 1938, 3.

48. Des Moines Register, 3 November 1923, 3.

49. Prairie Farmer, 24 November 1928, 17.

50. [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 13 October 1939, 5; Marion Star, 25 October 1940.

51. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 12 November 1932, 11.

52. Paulding Republican, 17 October 1935; Ohio Farmer, 9 November 1935, 3.

53. Redwood Falls Gazette, 10 November 1932, 3; Nebraska Farmer, 3 December 1927, 7; Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 6 December 1930, 6.

54. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 6 December 1930, 6.

55. [Spencer] Reporter, 13 October 1926, 12; 27 October 1926. Wallaces' Farmer, 5 November 1926, 5.

56. [Colfax] Tribune, 22 October 1931; 5 November 1931. [Nevada] Evening Journal, 6 November 1931; Wallaces' Farmer, 14 November 1931, 6.

57. Prairie Farmer, 21 October 1939, 19.

58. [Davenport] Democrat, 28 October 1940, 32. [Bedford] Taylor County Herald, 24 October 1940; 31 October 1940. Mount Ayr Record News, 24 October 1940; 31 October 1940.

59. Brewster Herald, 2 November 1933.

60. Davenport Democrat, 4 October 1940, 3; 9 October 1940, 18. [Maquoketa] Jackson County Sentinel, 1, 4 October 1940.

61. Davenport Democrat, 15 October 1940, 2; [Maquoketa] Jackson County Sentinel, 11 October 1940; 18 October 1940, 6.

62. The idea of holding a queen's contest was probably influenced by the beauty pageants. Although queen contests can be found in many cultures through time, both in myth and in fact, the twentieth-century contests were different because instead of choosing the queen on the whim of fate, popularity, or random choice, modern queens were chosen by a panel of judges who operated under formal rules and criteria, see A. R. Riverol, Live from Atlantic City: The History of the Miss America Pageant Before, After, and in Spite of Television (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 6. See both Riverol and Susan Browmiller, Femininity (New York: Linden Press, 1984) for further analysis of beauty contests. Riverol argues that the increased leisure time accompanying the nineteenth-century industrial revolution gave rise to a leisure industry which employed women as a gimmick to attract an audience, preferably a paying audience. Women found employment and opportunity in the leisure industry, leaving domestic and family-related work behind to sell their appearance in the marketplace. Businessmen in Atlantic City,

New Jersey, originated the modern queen contest, the Miss America Pageant, in 1921 as a promotional and financial venture, Riverol, Live Atlantic City, 12. [Marshall] Daily Democrat News, 3 November 1937.

63. [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 1 November 1938; 3 November 1938, 21. [Washington] Washington County Register, 11 October 1940.

64. Metamora Herald, 26 September 1941, 4; Galva News, 18 September 1941.

CORN-FARMING TECHNOLOGY AT THE CONTESTS

The corn husking contests provide a window through which to view the major changes occurring in agriculture in the 1920s and 1930s, which were the replacement of the horse with the tractor, the adoption of the mechanical corn picker, and the adoption of hybrid corn. The corn husking contests help identify the groups and interests pushing these changes, the methods they used to encourage farmers to adopt the changes, and the rate at which farmers actually adopted these changes. The corn husking contests give a local dimension to how these changes spread through the rural Midwest by providing specific instances of when and how these changes were absorbed into actual farming practices.[1]

The national contests, more than state and county contests, reflected the introduction of new corn-growing technology. State, and especially county, contests more closely paralleled new technology's acceptance and use on farms. At the national corn husking contests, farm equipment manufacturers, such as Caterpillar, International Harvester, and Oliver Equipment, along with agricultural engineers from state colleges, demonstrated and exhibited tractors, mechanical pickers, and other technological innovations, incorporating the newest developments in corn harvest technology into the fabric of the contests. Numerous other agricultural suppliers, such as Fairbanks-Morse, Goodyear, Firestone, and others regularly provided scales, portable elevators, scales, tires, and fertilizer for use in the national contests. By the late 1930s, the length of the national contests grew from one day to three or four days to accommodate all the equipment displays and demonstrations.

County contests, on the other hand, tended to use equipment owned and operated by local farmers, and thus more accurately reflected the rate of adoption of tractors and pickers on midwestern farms. County contests rarely included extensive demonstrations or displays of new equipment, and therefore remained one-day events. State contests fell somewhere between the national and county contests in the amount and type of new technology

used, depending to a large degree on the efforts of the sponsoring farm journal, the host community, local implement dealers, and area farmers. Some state contests attracted enough demonstration and display equipment to warrant expansion to two days.

By the mid-1930s, so many companies wanted to display and demonstrate their equipment and products at national and state contests that editors of sponsoring farm journals had to insist that advertisers receive preference over non-advertisers. In general, however, both towns and farm journals were glad to have as many farm industry representatives as possible at their contest. For one thing, a large number of displays were likely to attract a crowd, thereby increasing the chances of coverage by radio and newspaper reporters. Secondly, sponsors gained the use of new tractors and wagons for their contest. Third, the combined presence of so many elements of progressive agriculture, which placed new machinery, products, and methods in front of the eyes of potential customers, gave visitors the impression that industrialization was the wave of the future.

In retrospect, in might seem that the hand husking contests would be at odds with the modernizing trend toward the increased use of tractor-powered mechanical pickers to harvest hybrid corn. Yet the contests and technological innovation were really part of the same ideology. Contest sponsors, such as farm journals and town organizations, encouraged the participation of farm equipment and supply companies in the contests as fellow participants in the effort to find methods and machinery to make corn farming more efficient and productive. Host communities played a pivotal role by inviting equipment manufacturers to a national contest in the first place. The forward-looking businesses, groups, and individuals involved in the corn husking contests were not interested in trying to preserve the art of hand husking or to protect its central position in the corn harvest. The prevailing attitude among those involved in the corn husking contests was that if a technique, method, product, or machine could make husking faster and more efficient, then it should be adopted.

The corn husking contests provided farmers with an opportunity to observe the latest innovations in corn farming.

At the early contests, equipment demonstration and display were practically the same thing and were separate from the actual husking contest. The most common piece of machinery demonstrated at the early contests was the mechanical corn picker. Through the 1920s, local equipment dealers simply brought one or two mechanical pickers out to the contest site for a demonstration in a near-by field, after which the machines were parked and farmers looked them over. As the contests grew larger, the distinction between demonstration and display sharpened, and manufacturers began to send machinery specifically for each purpose. In the mid-1930s, contest organizers began to designate special areas for equipment display, usually near the food concessions. Equipment demonstration, meanwhile, became increasingly incorporated into the contests themselves, as the contests provided an opportunity to show new machinery, particularly tractors, wagons, and tires, operating under actual field conditions.

Machinery displays and demonstrations began at the corn husking contests in 1923 when Henry A. Wallace arranged for a mechanical picker to race against human pickers in order to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each. An article in Wallaces' Farmer the following year reported that the mechanical picker had put about three times more corn in a wagon in eighty minutes than had the fastest human husker. In 1925, representatives from McCormick-Deering brought a mechanical corn picker to the Midwest contest in Mercer County, Illinois. The machine easily beat the humans by husking 108.8 gross bushels of corn in eighty minutes, setting a new record for machine husking. The mechanical picker reportedly left significantly fewer husks on the ears than did the cleanest human husker. In a one-hundred pound sample taken from the corn husked by the machine, scorers found less than three ounces of husks. The machine reportedly did a good job of retrieving ears in down corn and from leaning

stalks. The chief objection to the mechanical picker heard at the contest, however, was that it shelled corn out of the butts of the ears, which dropped to the ground and was lost. This factor, more than any other, was soundly criticized by experienced farmers who thought the loss of grain was excessive.[2]

During the late-1920s and early 1930s, horse and mule enthusiasts showed their commitment to animal power despite the growing pressure to mechanize. Town organizers of national and state contests often held contests to find the most attractive, best-trained teams in the area to pull the husking wagons. One of the first instances of special attention given to contest horses occurred at the 1926 Illinois state contest when the Stark County equipment committee wanted to improve on the 1925 state contest held in Montgomery County. The 1925 equipment committee had used hard-working, but drab-looking mule teams to pull the contest wagons. The Stark County committee, in the competitive spirit of boosterism, located fifteen teams of matching grey horses and matching farm wagons for their contest. In Missouri, the 1929 national contest wagons were drawn by matched teams of Platte County mules. At the 1931 national contest in Iowa, the J. W. Boyt Harness Company of Des Moines, Iowa, sponsored a contest for horse teams and provided new harness sets for all the teams to wear in the husking contest. The winner of the team contest won a heavy harness from the company valued at almost eighty dollars.[3]

While horses and mules continued to draw contest wagons, equipment displays became more elaborate and distinct from field demonstrations. Separate displays of farm equipment began in 1930 at the national contest when Norton, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce invited several national manufacturers to ship display models of their equipment to Norton. This allowed a wider assortment of machinery to be put on display than might be gathered from the showrooms of local dealers. When set-up, the 1930 national display occupied an entire street block on the west side of the town square--a continuous, three-day implement show of tractors and farm

equipment. In contrast to the display of machinery, town organizers lined up matched teams of horses to draw the wagons in the contest.[4]

In 1932, the tractor won the debate with horses and mules in the minds of national contest organizers who borrowed the machines from equipment companies and used them to pull the husking wagons. For that contest, Caterpillar Company freighted-in eighteen new tractors and experienced operators, along with a factory representative. Caterpillar sent additional tractors and plows for display, and company employees built a soil conservation display terrace on the contest farm. During the contest, the tractors pulled the wagons through the muddy Henry County, Illinois, field. Commentators were of the opinion that the tractors performed better than horses could have under the same conditions, thus convincing the visiting delegation from West Point, Nebraska, to arrange for tractors to pull the wagons in the 1933 national contest. Some observers, however, continued to express their preference for horses and mules, especially in muddy conditions.[5]

For the 1933 national contest, the West Point Community Club, trying to make their contest the best ever held, arranged for "one of the largest displays of farm equipment ever assembled outside of a state fair," according to the editor of the West Point Republican. International Harvester alone sent five railroad cars loaded with equipment, including eighteen new Farmall tractors and farm wagons, mechanical pickers, and plows. Caterpillar sent a diesel tractor to demonstrate plowing and to operate its two-row corn picker. Allis-Chalmers sent six tractors and a corn combine, all on rubberized pneumatic tires, taking the opportunity to compare the plowing of a tractor mounted on pneumatic tires with a tractor on steel wheels, or on tracks, as the Caterpillar tractors were mounted. Throughout the day, the implement companies demonstrated corn pickers and other equipment. The muddy fields allowed dramatic demonstrations of rubber tires, just as they had in 1932.[6]

The corn husking contests bridged the period of transition from steel to hard rubber tractor tires and helped illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of both. In 1931, B. F. Goodrich Company introduced pneumatic rubber tires, which could be used on hard-surfaced, farm-to-market roads. Goodrich, Goodyear, and Firestone provided tires for contest tractors and wagons so that farmers could observe the tires in use. For the 1933 national contest at West Point, Nebraska, Goodyear and Firestone both erected tents for showing films of their tires operating under adverse field conditions.[7]

In order to more dramatically call attention to its participation in the contests, Goodyear planned, in several different years, to send its airship, the Blimp, to fly over the contest field. Unfortunately, complications with weather and handling facilities prevented the Blimp for flying over a national contest until 1940 at Davenport, Iowa. In 1941, the Blimp flew above the national contest at La Salle, Illinois, while on the ground, both Goodyear and Firestone set up displays and demonstrations.[8]

In 1934, at the national contest in Minnesota, seven different companies furnished a mixture of rubber and steel-tired tractors, and four wagon makers loaned the wagons, thus forestalling charges of favoritism from the companies and allowing visitors to compare several models side by side under identical conditions. As an added attraction, Allis-Chalmers shipped a team of racing tractors to Fairmont at a cost to the company of over one thousand dollars. Champion drivers raced the tractors at the fairgrounds track after the corn husking contest concluded. Approximately eight thousand visitors attended, prompting company spokesmen to say that the sales outlook for the region was improving.[9]

For the 1936 national contest in Ohio, twelve tractor companies, including Allis-Chalmers, International Harvester, J. I. Case, Minneapolis-Moline, and Oliver Equipment Company furnished a total of eighteen new tractors and new, rubber-tired wagons for the contests. At this time, about 14 percent of all wheeled tractors in the country were

mounted on rubber, but by 1940, almost 85 percent of tractors had rubber wheels. The companies also furnished tractor-powered mechanical unloaders to expedite the handling of the harvested corn, thus hurrying the computing of huskers' deductions and the posting of contest results. All of the companies providing equipment had exhibits at the contest, which, together with other suppliers, made a total of about fifty equipment exhibits.[10]

Various companies furnished equipment for both national and state contests, which increased the speed and efficiency of scoring the contests. Contests had to be held near a good set of platform scales in order to weigh the wagonloads of corn. Sometimes host farms had scales, or could borrow a set from the another farm or the town elevator. Occasionally, especially for county contests, corn had to be taken to a storage elevator to be weighed. In the mid-1920s, Fairbanks-Morse Company, manufacturers of farm scales, began providing new wagon scales, usually through local dealers, for contest use. For the 1933 national contest in Nebraska, Fairbanks-Morse Company loaned a ten-ton wagon and truck scale, and for the 1935 Kansas state contest the company sent a new wagon scale from Kansas City to weigh the loads. The pitless scale was set out in the middle of the grounds so that the crowd could watch the weighing.[11]

During the 1930s, manufacturers and agricultural suppliers increasingly used the national contests to showcase their equipment. At the 1932 national in Illinois, for example, Soya Products displayed some fifty items made from soybeans, and Boss Manufacturing Company of Kewanee, Illinois, exhibited its line of husking hooks, gloves, and mittens. In 1934, approximately thirty companies exhibited corn husking machinery, hardware, and oil products. The 1938 national contest displays included machinery, hybrid corn, fertilizers, milkers and separators, batteries, heaters, poultry supplies, oil and grease, and farm electrical plants. In all, about forty firms, including nearly every tractor manufacturer in the

nation, displayed machinery. At the 1940 national, fifty farm equipment manufacturers set up exhibits to cover several acres.[12]

Manufacturers displayed over half a million dollars worth of farm equipment at the 1939 national contest near Lawrence, Kansas. Allis-Chalmers alone sent ten railroad cars of farm equipment. The show area for the displays, concessions, judging and announcements covered about sixty acres. The food stands met state Board of Health regulations and health inspectors supervised their operation at the contest site. Workers set up a total of forty tents at that contest, requiring two and a half days, five carpenters, and two laborers; Kansas State University's display occupied the largest tent.[13]

Increasingly, exhibitors branched into more mainstream consumer goods, such as at the 1935 national contest near Fowler, Indiana, where visitors could inspect radios, washing machines, and four full lines of new 1936 cars and trucks. One company sold every car it brought. At the 1940 national contest near Davenport, Iowa, car manufacturers set up a thirty thousand square foot tent for their new car exhibit.[14]

In the mid-1930s, journals sponsoring the national contests found that they needed to place some order in the equipment and supply displays, so the corn husking editors began to divide the display area into lots and assign each lot to a particular company. The layouts gave order to the open space. In later years, when the contests attracted hundreds of thousands of people, the layouts provided a location map for visitors to find their way around to particular displays.

In 1934, Barry Akers, corn husking editor of the Farmer, made the first formal layout for what he called, "the largest machinery show ever seen in Minnesota outside the state fair." The formal layout developed out of the need to efficiently divide a limited amount of space among the growing number of companies and manufacturers who wanted to display their products at the contests. When several machinery manufacturers suggested that their standing as prominent journal advertisers should entitle them

to first consideration for display space over non-advertisers, who were gaining invitations through the town committee, Akers assumed final authority for who would be allowed to set up a booth at the contest. He made it clear that arrangements had to be made through him, not local committees, thus ensuring that his advertisers would have a place.[15]

Layouts helped decrease congestion around eating stands, kept displays and demonstrations within a convenient distance, grouped similar activities together, and gave sponsors more control over contest activities. Like almost everything else associated with the corn husking contests, layouts began simply and grew increasingly complex over time. In 1934, at the national near Fairmont, the concessions lined the contest field on two sides. In 1935 at the national contest near Newtown, Indiana, the concession and exhibit tents were arranged in a horseshoe shape with the center opening holding a stage for entertainment, announcements, and the scoreboard. The horseshoe shape proved popular in Indiana and Illinois state contests. In 1940, at the Illinois state contest, the horseshoe-shaped concession area included over sixty commercial exhibits and eating concessions in a thirty-acre pasture.[16]

Some exhibitors offered prizes to visitors who registered at their booths as a way of collecting names of potential customers. One exhibitor at the 1934 national contest collected over thirty-two thousand names by offering a pig to the person who guessed its correct weight. The day following the corn husking contest, the local newspaper received more telephone calls concerning the weight of the pig than inquiries as to who had won the husking contest. Barry Akers idly wondered how the pig would be divided to satisfy all the people who guessed the correct weight.[17]

The tremendous investment by equipment companies in transporting, setting-up, operating, and maintaining the equipment displays and demonstrations at the contests prompted farm journals to add more days to the event to allow visitors a greater opportunity to see the exhibits. The national was first expanded to two days in 1937; the first day's

activities focused on the machinery exhibit, and the second day featured a mule show and the corn husking contest. The 1938 contest was likewise a two-day event: Wednesday was Power and Equipment Day, and Thursday was the husking contest. The three-day 1939 national contest began with Resource-Full Kansas Day, sponsored by the state agricultural college. The second day was dubbed Farm Power and Equipment Day, and on the final day, Friday, the parade and the husking contest were held, followed by a football game at the Kansas University stadium. In both 1940 and 1941, the national contest lasted four days. Despite the expansion of contest-related activities, the actual husking contest remained an eighty-minute event.[18]

State and county contests, in contrast to the nationals, more accurately reflected the equipment that farmers were using, a situation sharply demonstrated in 1932 in Illinois, when tractors pulled the husking wagons at the national, but farmers' mule teams pulled the wagons at the state contest in Piatt County. In some cases, however, animals were used even when tractors were available, as many organizers said that they preferred to use horses and mules in muddy fields. Simple loyalty to horses kept them in the contests in other areas, such as in the horse-breeding region of western Ohio. Contests for the best-looking and best-trained teams, similar to those held in conjunction with the early national corn husking contests, encouraged farmers to loan their animals, especially for state contests, such as the 1937 Kansas state contest. The 1937 Ohio state contest was held in Wyandot County, known for its breeders of Percheron and Belgian horses. After a contest, the winning teams pulled the husking wagons. In 1939, the organizers of the Brookings County, South Dakota contest, awarded prizes for the best team and wagon in that husking contest.[19]

Tractors replaced horses and mules in county and state contests generally after 50 percent of the host county's farms had acquired tractors. By 1940, the average number of tractors on midwestern farms had

increased to only about 46 percent, thus many county contests continued to use horses and mules. In the cash grain and livestock feeding counties of Grundy in Iowa, Henry in Illinois, Redwood in Minnesota, Deuel in South Dakota, Cuming in Nebraska, and Benton in Indiana, however, the average number of tractors on farms was much higher than the midwest average, reaching 74 percent in 1940. Corn husking contests in these counties began using tractors earlier than in other areas. In 1935, tractors were first used in Illinois and Iowa state contests. The Illinois contest was held in Woodford County, a county leading both the state and the Midwest in tractor ownership. In 1930, 50 percent of Woodford County farms possessed tractors, and in 1940, 80 percent had tractors. The 1935 Iowa contest was held in Scott County, an area where tractor ownership rose from 40 percent in 1930 to 67 percent in 1940. Farmers in the cattle grazing, cattle ranging, and eastern sections were slower to incorporate tractors into their farm work, which reflects their slower rate of tractor purchases. In 1940, only 37 percent of farmers in Indiana, 36 percent of farmers in Ohio, and 16 percent of farmers in Missouri owned tractors.[20]

Once begun, the trend toward tractors continued. In Minnesota, the use of tractors in state contests began in 1936, when the Morristown equipment committee in Rice County located enough local tractors to pull the husking wagons. In 1937, the Illinois state contest held in Bureau County used tractors. State contests in Ohio mechanized in 1940, when the Marion Chamber of Commerce equipment committee lined up twenty new tractors and wagons from manufacturers such as International Harvester, John Deere, J. I. Case, Massey-Harris, Minneapolis-Moline, Oliver, Allis-Chalmers, and Caterpillar. In 1941, the Kansas Farmer planned to use tractors for the first time in its state contest held in Franklin County, but used twenty-five teams of horses at the last minute because of the muddy conditions. Although most county contests continued to use horses or mules, some of the more mechanized counties adopted the use of tractors, as did Woodford County, beginning in 1936.[21]

In contrast to county and state contests, a national contest did not necessarily reflect a certain level of tractor ownership within the host county. For example, Licking County, Ohio, which hosted the 1936 national contest, had fewer tractors on its farms in 1930 and 1940 than did the average Ohio farm. In 1930, 14 percent of Licking County farms had tractors, and in 1940, 25 percent had tractors, compared with a statewide tractor-ownership rate of 23 percent in 1930 and 36 percent in 1940. Thus, less than one-quarter of Licking County farmers owned tractors the year that equipment companies supplied tractors to pull the husking wagons in the national contest. Relatively low numbers of tractors on Licking County farms may have been influenced by the continued popularity of shock husking and fodder-making. From 1931 to 1941, Licking County corn husking contests regularly featured both shock husking and husking from standing corn. Similarly, the 1939 national contest was held in Douglas County, Kansas, where only 48 percent of county farms had tractors, and again the tractors used for the contests came for national manufacturers.[22]

The decision to trade their horses for tractors was not an easy one for most midwestern farmers to make, nor for farm journals and experiment stations to advise. The last two studied the question in depth for many years in an effort to determine which source of power was the most efficient and cost effective, especially for running a mechanical picker. Tractor manufacturers, meanwhile, emphasized the greater power available with their machines. Midwestern farmers compromised by using both horses and tractors during the 1930s. As farmers purchased tractors, however, they reduced their number of horses, so that by 1940, the total number of horses in midwestern states had declined by approximately 30 percent, from about 6.2 million in 1930 to about 4.4 million in 1940.[23]

The reduction in the use of horses, like the spread of the use of tractors, occurred unevenly. In Grundy County, Iowa, from 1930 to 1940, for example, the number of horses on farms declined by about 32 percent, from 10,519 horses to 6502 horses, but in Licking County, Ohio, the number

of horses on farms declined by about only 5 percent, from 7860 horses to 7457 horses during the same period, not surprising given the low rate of tractor ownership. Despite the decline in the overall number of horses, the majority of farms still used horses for some tasks. Even in the cash grain and livestock feeding counties, like Grundy in Iowa, Henry in Illinois, Redwood in Minnesota, Deuel in South Dakota, and Benton in Indiana, where tractor ownership tended to be strong, the number of farms with at least one horse decreased on average only about 3 percent, from about 93 to 90 percent from 1930 to 1940. Woodford County, Illinois, was an exception to this general trend; the number of farms with horses in that county fell from 91 percent in 1930 to 73 percent in 1940. In 1941, the Prairie Farmer reported that most farmers still kept at least one team of horses on their farms for some corn planting, but an increasing number were discovering that they could get along without horses.[24]

At the contests, the use of horses and mules received as much emphasis from local organizers, perhaps more in some counties, than did tractors. The divergent interests surfaced when equipment manufacturers provided equipment for national contests, and horse enthusiasts on local committees countered by lining up horse and mule demonstrations as part of contest entertainment. Hitching demonstrations were one popular method of showing how to increase horse power while retaining control over the animals, as in 1931, when Harry Linn demonstrated both four and eight-horse hitches at the national contest in Iowa. Draft team shows were regular features at the Ohio state corn husking contests during the late-1930s. In 1937, the Kansas state contest included a mule team show and a number of rodeo and horse racing events; Allen County organizers included the horse events to encourage the breeding of better horses and for entertainment. At the 1939 national contest near Lawrence, Kansas, Wilson and Company's "world champion" Clydesdale six-horse hitch was exhibited.[25]

Demonstrations of farm equipment at state contests began about the same time as demonstrations at national contests. They were typically

smaller versions of national contest demonstrations and displays, and generally did not require that additional days to be added to the contests. State contests, therefore, generally continued as one-day events, except in Ohio, where the state contest expanded to two days beginning in 1938. Shock husking was held on the first day and the regular husking contest on the second day. While no other farm journal lengthened its state contests, in 1941, the Prairie Farmer combined its state contest with the national, holding them both on the same farm within the same week.[26]

Of all the states, Ohio began its equipment demonstrations the earliest and tied them most directly to the activities and interests of equipment manufacturers and the state experiment station. At the 1930 Ohio Corn Harvest Field Day, both International Harvester and John Deere showed one-row and two-row pickers; J. I. Case, Oliver Equipment, and the New Idea Spreader Company each demonstrated their two-row picker. At the Ohio 1932 Corn Field Days, four machinery manufacturers and the state extension service conducted a number of demonstrations. One and two-row corn pickers were demonstrated in a thirty-acre site near the husking contest field. The Ohio extension service presented a fertilizer demonstration that compared the hill fertilization method with the broadcast application method; the hill method outperformed the broadcast method by seven bushels. At the 1940 Ohio state contest, approximately sixty manufacturers of farm equipment and supplies demonstrated and displayed their products in exhibits covering fifteen acres at the state contest held near Marion.[27]

Unlike the equipment displays and demonstrations, the work of preparing the contest fields during the spring and summer months was not directly visible to contest visitors. Yet, equipment companies and suppliers often played an important role in this crucial step of preparing for a corn husking contest. In some cases, especially for contests of the 1920s and early 1930s, a farmer might give special attention to preparing

and planting a particular field without any firm commitment from contest sponsors. In these cases, the farmer spent his own time, materials, and equipment to prepare the field. In 1930, F. W. Palmer, a farmer near Norton, Kansas, used his own tractor to entirely plow, plant, and cultivate a field that he hoped would be chosen for the national contest. When a farm journal or the county extension began looking for a contest field, the farmer with a particularly well-prepared field often volunteered, or was asked, to host a contest.[28]

The amount of corporate support supplied for the preparation of a national contest field depended to some degree on the sponsoring farm journal and its relationships with public and private agricultural suppliers. For the 1934 national contest, the Farmer selected a contest field owned by the Fairmont Canning Company, who gave special attention to field preparation. The company fall-plowed the field, top-dressed it with steer manure in the spring, double-disced it twice, and applied chemical fertilizer supplied by the Farm Bureau Service Company. Fertilizer companies got involved in the contests by offering to fertilize a proposed contest field. Fertilizer for both the 1936 and 1937 Illinois contest was furnished by Darling and Company of Chicago. Neither contest field owner had previously used fertilizer, believing that it was not necessary. The 1937 contest host, Frank Grisell, however, became convinced of fertilizer's benefits when his fertilized field produced twelve to fifteen more bushels of corn than an unfertilized, adjoining field.[29]

The presence of tractors and mechanical pickers continually increased at the contests, but their presence had only an indirect influence on the actual husking of corn. Tractors were mainly used to pull the contest wagons, and thus to advertise the machinery. Mechanical pickers played only a minor role in the actual contests by opening the fields and husking out the corn between contest lands. Hybrid corn, on the other hand, had a direct effect on the contests by allowing husking to be performed at a faster pace, adding a new level of excitement because of the possibility

of higher husking scores, possibly even a new record. Further, hybrids allowed contests, and the midwestern corn harvest, to begin and end several weeks earlier than in previous years.

When the contests began, midwestern farmers and contest hosts planted open-pollinated corn varieties adapted to local conditions. The most common varieties in Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska were Reid's Yellow Dent and Krug's corn, which was an improved strain of Reid's Yellow Dent. Reid's was also popular in Minnesota, along with Murdock Yellow Dent and Golden Jewell. By the time the contests ended, many midwestern corn growers and all national contest hosts were planting hybrids. Although it is impossible to measure the influence that the corn husking contests had on a farmer's decision to plant hybrids, it is clear that contest fields planted to hybrid corn exposed a large number of farmers to hybrids and gave them a first-hand opportunity to see how a hybrid performed under specific soil and climate conditions, how it husked out, and how it yielded.[30]

The open-pollinated varieties popular at the first husking contests resulted from several decades of selective corn breeding performed by a small group of farmers and scientists. Many of these same breeders helped develop hybrid corn and supplied seed for the husking contests. The ultimate goal of these breeders was to increase yields; but their short-terms goals involved improving specific characteristics of corn. James Reid, for example, bred corn in the late-1800s for high germination rates, on the theory that the greater number of plants in a field, the greater the likelihood that yields would be high. Through the years, the short-term goals of breeders changed; when they reached the limits of yield improvement offered by one characteristic of corn, they turned their attention to a different characteristic. Subsequent short-term goals included attaining a uniform appearance on the cob, improving stalk strength, and increasing the size and weight of the ears. None of these

characteristics, however, had the effect on yields later achieved by hybrids.

Farmers learned about specially-bred corn through fairs, exhibits, word of mouth, observation of neighbor's fields, from the farm press, and, after about 1915, from county extension agents. Reid's corn became popular after it won a prize at the Illinois State Fair corn show in 1891 and was exhibited in Chicago at the World's Fair in 1893. Around 1900, agronomist Perry Holden, who at that time was working for corn breeder Eugene Funk in central Illinois, obtained some Yellow Dent from James Reid. Holden began to cross Funk's varieties with the Reid corn, firmly establishing the presence of Yellow Dent in the Funk seed line. When Holden moved to Iowa State College at Ames in 1902, he brought some of the Reid corn with him. During the next few years, Holden became known as the "corn evangelist" for his work on the Iowa Seed Corn Trains, where he distributed small amounts of Reid's Yellow Dent to farmers. Farmers were so impressed with the germination rates of the seed that within a few years Reid's became the leading open-pollinated variety in the central Midwest. According to Henry A. Wallace, Reid's Yellow Dent was so highly regarded that the variety eventually provided more germ plasm for modern hybrids than any other corn. Not only did the variety germinate well, but Reid's corn was well-adapted to the region and generally grew well, thus making it favored by corn growers.[31]

In the late-1910s, George Krug, a farmer in Woodford County, Illinois, began crossing a Nebraska strain of Reid's Yellow Dent with a variety known as Iowa Gold Mine to produce a new variety known simply as Krug's. Krug, like James Reid, selected his seed only from the strongest, healthiest plants. Krug's corn was characterized by heavy-feeling ears, sturdy stalks, and oily-appearing kernels. In the early 1920s, Krug's seed won the Woodford County Three Year Corn-Yield Test, one of the first corn-yield tests organized by an extension agent. After winning the yield contest, however, Krug began to select his seed corn based on its

uniformity of appearance rather than on the characteristics of the parent plant. In doing so, Krug reduced the high yields that he had earlier achieved. Before the high-yielding characteristics of Krug corn were lost, another Woodford County farmer, Lester Pfister, began to inbreed Krug corn, around 1923, and was able to preserve its high-yield characteristics. Pfister, a private breeder like Funk and Henry A. Wallace, provided a considerable amount of hybrid seed for the husking contests.[32]

In the 1920s, huskers in the central Midwest were accustomed to husking in Reid-type corn. Most of the champion huskers in the early contests had developed their styles, techniques, and husking tools for the tall-stalked, big-eared, loose-husked variety. Of course, all Reid varieties were not exactly the same, but generally they shared many characteristics. One characteristic that made Reid varieties suitable for hand husking was that the plant carried one large ear on a slender shank. This made it possible to husk quickly because huskers did not have to waste time looking for additional ears after they had picked the first ear, and the ear broke off easily from the shank. Good as it was for hand husking, Reid's Yellow Dent was about the worst possible variety for machine husking because the ear broke away from the shank too easily. Certain varieties of Reid's Yellow Dent also had a weak stalks, which made them susceptibly to being blown down by wind and rain, and huskers had a difficult time retrieving corn from down stalks.[33]

Although open-pollinated, some of the corn husked in early contests had been carefully bred. Henry A. Wallace, for example, held the first three Iowa husking contests, from 1922 to 1924, in his own corn fields north of Des Moines. While Wallace was more interested in evaluating the human variable in husking than he was in the corn variable, it is possible that some of these contests were held in Wallace's experimental corn. In Illinois, the 1927 state contest was held in Funk's Yellow Dent, and in 1928 in yellow corn grown by Henry County breeders, the Morgan Brothers.

In Minnesota in 1928, the state husking contest used Minnesota Number 13, an open-pollinated variety developed by the University of Minnesota.[34]

Hybrid corn became generally available around 1927 and 1928 when improved breeding techniques made it commercially viable. Early hybrids had little to recommend them over open-pollinated varieties, although some, such as Wallace's Copper Cross, did return higher yields than regular seed corn. Most early hybrids, however, were lackluster in terms of yields. Hybrids gained acceptance slowly, as farmers planted only a few experimental acres at a time, gradually increasing their plantings each succeeding year. Generally, several years passed before farmers planted their entire corn acreage to hybrids.[35]

Hybrid seed for national and state contests came mainly from two sources. Private breeders like Wallace, Funk, and Pfister typically provided seed when a contest was held in their vicinity. Public breeders at state agricultural experiment stations either directly furnished hybrid seed for the contests or made the seed available through a private company. In the mid-1930s, the Minnesota experiment station supplied hybrid seed for contests held in that state. In Wisconsin in 1940, a state which only began holding contests in 1937, the University of Wisconsin furnished the seed for the state contest. Indirectly, many of the inbred lines developed at the experiment stations found their way into the hands of private breeders, who then supplied them for the husking contests in addition to selling them on the open market.[36]

In 1930, the Prairie Farmer introduced hybrids to its Illinois contest by selecting Funk Farms in McLean County to host the state contest in a field of F1 hybrid corn. Subsequently, the 1931 and 1932 state contests were held in Reid's Yellow Dent. In 1933, however, contest host Herman Moews raised a field of farm-bred yellow hybrid corn for the state contest in Putnam County. In 1934, the contest was held in open-pollinated Krug corn, but from 1935 until the end of the contests, hybrids from corn breeders were planted for the Illinois contests. The 1936 state contest

was held in a DeKalb County field of hybrid corn bred by C. L. Gunn, who was a member of the Illinois Crop Association.[37]

Other farm journals lagged behind Wallaces' Farmer and the Prairie Farmer in lining up hybrid corn fields for their state contests. In 1933, the Farmer held Minnesota's first hybrid husking contest in Watonwan County in a varietal cross that combined Murdock Yellow Dent and Minnesota Number 13. In 1937, Ohio first used hybrid corn in a state contest; it is likely that the seed was jointly furnished by the Ohio Experiment Station and the Ohio Seed Improvement Association. Indiana's first state contest in hybrid corn was apparently held in 1938. In 1939, the Missouri Ruralist sponsored its first hybrid contest in Pfister's corn. It is unclear exactly when the Kansas Farmer and the Nebraska Farmer began holding their state contests in hybrid corn, but Nebraska's first contest in hybrid corn probably occurred in 1940. The first mention of hybrid corn in a Kansas state contest appears in 1940 when Peppard's Funk Bred Hybrid "G" saved the drought-stressed corn field.[38]

Two years after first appearing in Iowa's contest, a hybrid was planted for the 1931 national contest, making it the first national contest to be held in hybrid corn. Not surprisingly, Wallaces' Farmer sponsored the contest. In Grundy County, Iowa, contest enthusiast Lou Plager worked under Henry A. Wallace's direction to supervise the preparation of three potential contest fields. Two hybrid varieties from Hi-Bred Corn Company, low-eared Baker 164 and large-eared Number 301, were planted in three fields. Wallace personally guided field preparation and planting, suggesting that both varieties be planted at the rate of three kernels to the hill. Wallace advised Plager on the size of seed plate to be used in the planter, the spacing of the seed during planting, and cultivation.[39]

Wallace's enthusiasm for the corn husking contest attracted support from other sources. When the International Harvester manager at Cedar Falls, Iowa, learned that Wallace was providing the contest seed, he

offered to donate the necessary men and machines to plant the corn according to Wallace's specifications. Wallace and Plager accepted his offer, and International Harvester employees disced and harrowed the three fields, applying superphosphate donated by Mesquakie Mills of Cedar Rapids. By mid-July, an estimate showed all three fields were expected to yield between sixty and seventy bushels per acre. The two fields not chosen for the national contest were used in the county and district contests.[40]

The national contest the following year, 1932, was likewise held in hybrid corn, arguably the best corn grown for any husking contest up to that time. Prairie Farmer editor Clifford Gregory left the field preparation up to host farmer Robert Peterson, who planted Morgan Brothers' Number 106 in the spring of 1932. By late summer the stand was nearly perfect, the large ears placed at the just the right height on the stalk for hand husking. The yellow hybrid husked out easily from the stalks at about one hundred thirty ears in one hundred pounds, comparing favorably with the open-pollinated Golden Jewel variety popular in Minnesota. The yield was estimated at about ninety bushels per acre, and an occasional ear was found to weigh as much as a pound and a half. Even though the weather turned miserable, with rain, snow, and sleet in the weeks just before the contest, and a cold, raw wind on the day of the contest, husker Carl Seiler set a new national record in the field, husking 36.9 bushels of corn in eighty minutes.[41]

In 1934 in Minnesota, both the national contest, held near Fairmont in southern Minnesota, and the state contest, held in Steele County, were in hybrid corn. In anticipation of the national contest, the Fairmont Canning Company planted seven fields to Minhybrid 301, a three-way cross introduced by the Minnesota Experiment State in 1933. A three-way cross was easier to produce than a double cross, requiring only three inbred lines instead of four. The Farmers Seed and Nursery Company supplied the seed to Barry Akers of the Farmer early in the spring of 1934, and by

fall, the hybrid brought an estimated yield of sixty bushels per acre, having been fertilized with three tons of commercial fertilizer from the Farm Bureau Service Company as well as with manure.[42]

Farmers in the western Corn Belt adopted hybrids more slowly than farmers in the cash grain and livestock feeding sections, although many western farmers were breeding open-pollinated varieties to improve yields. For the 1933 national near West Point, Nebraska, local seed breeder R. F. Roggenbach of Wisner, Nebraska, provided a smooth Yellow Dent, which yielded an estimated fifty bushels per acre in a forty acre field. The field had been lister-planted and specially fertilized for the national contest. In western states, the drought years of the mid-1930s, along with a limited supply of seed, kept farmers from planting hybrids in any significant amounts until 1938 and 1939. In 1939, the Kansas Farmer reported that approximately 5 percent of the total corn acreage of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma had been planted to hybrids.[43]

The 1935 national contest was held in a yellow, big-eared hybrid corn, adapted to Indiana. The corn yielded an estimated eighty-five bushels per acre in rows just over a quarter-mile long. Across the Midwest that year, hybrids and favorable weather had allowed huskers to set new records in state contests, and these huskers, many of them seasoned contestants like Irvin Bauman of Illinois, Lawrence Pitzer of Indiana, William Rose of Illinois, E. H. Hendricks of Iowa, Ted Balko of Minnesota, Lawrence House of Kansas, Richard Anderson of South Dakota, and Layton Roberts of Missouri, came to the national contest with the well-founded intention of breaking the national record. All were outdone by Elmer Carlson from Audubon County, Iowa, who brought in the largest gross load, scoring 41.5 bushels after deductions to win the state contest and set a new national record.[44]

After 1935, hybrid use rose rapidly as evidenced by growing seed corn sales. Between 1934 and 1944, sales of hybrid seed-corn rose to over seventy million dollars and a large number of new varieties became

available. Farmers did not cite higher yields as their primary reason for trying hybrid seed. Instead, they tended to be more swayed by what they observed about the corn as it stood in the field than by an improvement in a single year's yield, which could have been caused by the weather or other factors.[45]

The belief that a carefully prepared contest field of high-yielding corn was essential for a successful contest proved to be more than a axiom with the 1936 national contest. This contest was originally scheduled to be held in Missouri, but the drought was so widespread that year that sponsors could not find an acceptable field. In August, the farm journal editors decided to hold the national contest to Ohio instead of Missouri. The Ohio Farmer welcomed the change, anxious to make a name for itself as a premier corn growing state. The journal chose Licking County to host the contest in response to an offer by the Agrarian Club to organize the local aspects of the contest. With less than three months to plan the contest, sponsors selected the host farm more for its appearance and location, and for the reputation of its owner, than for the quality of the field of corn. Host Alva Oyler's one hundred-acre corn field was chosen for the contest primarily because it was located on a modern, well-maintained farm, conveniently located twenty-five miles east of Columbus on U.S. Highway 40 and state Highway 37.[46]

Although many elements for a successful contest were present, the corn was poor, and the weather unpleasant. Oyler's uneven, hilly field had been planted to an open-pollinated variety of corn which had germinated poorly, averaging only slightly better than one ear per hill. Nevertheless, his estimated yield was sixty bushels per acre. In the weeks just prior to the contest, the weather turned wet and cold. A heavy rain, with strong winds and hail, pounded the field, followed by an eight-inch snow that melted just before the contest started, leaving parts of the field either underwater or very muddy. On the day of the contest, most of the corn lay

on the wet and muddy ground, reducing Oyler's yield to about thirty-five bushels per acre.[47]

If the 1936 national contest was miserable for the corn, huskers and visitors, the 1937 contest was worse. Set on the Weber Brothers farm near Marshall, Missouri, the contest was held in a fifty-acre field of open-pollinated corn, where each husker was allotted a land ten-rows wide and a quarter-mile long. In the weeks before the contest, the tight-husked corn had dried out so that it broke away from the stalks with difficulty. As soon as the contest began, a chilly rain started to pour out of the skies and continued until after the contest ended. Wallaces' Farmer described it as one of the most difficult contests ever held. Huskers and the crowd were soaked within a few minutes. The crowd soon deserted the contest field to take shelter under the tents and awnings of the exhibit area, listening to the NBC radio report of the huskers' progress from announcer Hal Totten who followed the huskers and their wagons through the fields. Many spectators left the grounds before the contest was over, afraid that they might become stuck in the parking areas if they stayed too long. At the end of the day, only a handful of the one hundred thousand visitors were still present to hear the contest winners announced; many people heard the announcement over the car radio on their way home.[48]

In the contest field, the huskers experienced the worst possible conditions. The dry husks on the corn readily absorbed the moisture, increasing husk weight three to four times. The wet husks stuck to the corn even more tightly than when dry. Consequently, huskers received more husk deductions in this national contest than in any other. William Rose, an experienced husker, who won the Illinois state championship the following year, brought in the heaviest load at 2025 gross pounds, but Rose had almost thirty ounces of husks in his one hundred pound sample, which cost him a deduction of 1342 pounds and reduced his net weight to 683 pounds, or about nine bushels. Rose finished in eighteenth out of twenty. Only the contest winner, Ray Hanson of Cottonwood County,

Minnesota, brought in a load with a net weight over twenty bushels, having a comparably light 263 pounds of deductions. As in several previous years, the contest was won by the man who husked the cleanest, not the one who brought in the most corn.[49]

Hanson won the contest by husking slowly and taking time to remove as many husks as possible. If this had not been the national contest, it is highly unlikely that any farmer would have chosen to husk in the poor field and weather conditions. The corn picked at the 1937 contest was not fit to be cribbed until it dried out. This aspect of the contests separated them from actual farm activity; sometimes field conditions dictated that a farmer leave more husks on his corn than optimal, and a farmer usually choose extra husks over the additional time required to perform clean husking. In the contests, a husker was not asked to use his judgement regarding the best harvesting method for the field, he was required to husk it out as if the field was in prime condition. This encouraged the use of unrealistic husking strategies.

After 1937, no national contest sponsor ever again took a chance with open-pollinated corn, even though the weather in 1937 was as much to blame as the corn for the miserable day. All the national contests held from 1938 until 1941 were in hybrid corn. When the national came to Kansas in 1939, a hybrid corn was planted which was credited with saving the contest. For the contest, tenant farmer Paul Leonhard lister-planted Pioneer Hybrid 313, a single cross hybrid from Garst and Thomas Hybrid Corn Company of Coon Rapids, Iowa, on land owned by the University of Kansas. In the field, the hybrid corn tasseled on the sixth of July, but could not pollinate for three weeks as temperatures rose above one hundred degrees nearly every day, and no rain fell. When the rain finally came, it poured down three inches on the parched corn and dry ground. Many open-pollinated varieties in the area were destroyed, but the rain helped complete the pollination of the hybrid and saved it. The corn produced a

respectable sixty bushels per acre, although some of it was down on the day of the contest.[50]

By 1938, the general increase in corn yields across the Midwest were being attributed to hybrid seed. Yield improvements varied geographically, but hybrids clearly outyielded most open-pollinated varieties, by 15 to 25 percent in some locations. Hybrid strains improved through continued breeding experiments. The experiment stations worked with farmers to identify the best hybrids for local conditions. Between 1930 and 1936, the Ohio Experiment Station had conducted hybrid performance tests at more than fourteen different locations. The tests helped scientists identify and cultivate the most desirable hybrids and reject the less promising ones. Some hybrid strains showed a 26 percent yield gain from 1930 to 1935.[51]

In Illinois, the Prairie Farmer reported that the majority of that state's farmers had adopted hybrid corn between 1935 and 1940. In 1935, only a few thousand Illinois acres had been planted to hybrid corn, but by 1940, 77 percent of the total corn acreage was in hybrid corn. Not only did the hybrids show a 16 percent average higher yield than open-pollinated varieties, the hybrids also stood up better in the field, the journal reported. Farmers tried hybrid corn because they witnessed its performance over open-pollinated varieties in the many field tests held by scientists and commercial growers. Even after adopting hybrids, farmers continued to test corn varieties for local adaptability. In 1941, for example, Illinois farmers tested over 362 different varieties in corn yield tests.[52]

The host farmers for the 1940 and 1941 national contests were both well-mechanized, modern farmers who used scientific farming methods in their operations. Henry Keppy in Iowa and Theodore Schafer in Illinois personally prepared their fields for the national contest. The Keppy farm, located seven miles northwest of Davenport, Iowa, on state Highway 74, was selected primarily for its location and field layout. Field preparation

began in early in 1940 when Wallaces' Farmer held a drawing to select a company to provide the seed corn. Several companies, including Wallace's Pioneer Hi-Bred, wanted to supply the contest seed because it afforded an excellent advertising opportunity. Further, the seed company could direct the planting, fertilization, and cultivation in a way that would show the corn to its best advantage. Pfister Company of El Paso, Illinois, won the drawing and supplied the hybrid seed for the contest.[53]

Keppy planted his field in the familiar check-row pattern, hills thirty inches apart in all directions. Darling and Company furnished the artificial fertilizer. When mature, the corn was estimated to yield at about ninety bushels per acre. Good weather before and during the contest helped keep the field in excellent condition and helped Irvin Bauman of Woodford County, Illinois, eclipse Elmer Carlson's 1935 national husking record.[54]

In the spring of 1941, Theodore Schafer in LaSalle County, Illinois, prepared his field for the national contest with much of his own equipment. Using a tractor, he plowed the field between six and seven inches deep and harrowed immediately after plowing. Within the next few days he double-disced the field, harrowed a second time, and planted the corn with a mechanical planter. Just before the corn emerged, Schafer harrowed a third time. He cultivated as thoroughly as he had harrowed, a total of three times during the spring and early summer. Schafer's forty-five acre field stood straight and uniform despite excessive rain and wind in the weeks just prior to the contest. Although the corn was good, yielding about eighty-five bushels per acre, the muddy field on the day of the contest slowed the huskers down so that first place winner Floyd Wise netted only 45.37 bushels instead of a possible new national record. The corn husked so cleanly that fifteen of the huskers, including Wise, were not charged any husk deductions. Schafer had planted Funk's hybrid G53 seed corn in the contest field. By this date, Funk's G varieties were well-adapted to much of the Midwest. Of the eleven state corn husking

contests held in 1941, seven used a Funk's G hybrid; only Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, and Pennsylvania used hybrids other than Funk's G.[55]

Hybrid corn had several features to recommend it over open-pollinated varieties. For one, its strong stalks and roots prevented it from leaning over or falling down, called lodging, as it neared maturity. Hybrid ears separated easier from the husk than most open-pollinated varieties because the husks were looser. The height of the ear from the ground was more uniform, and human husking became more like machine husking as pickers were able to pick practically every ear with a minimum of movement, maintaining continuous non-stop flow of corn into the wagon. Hybrids increased the likelihood that contest husking would be fast because of greater competition based on human ability rather than on variation in the field or the corn. Thus with hybrids, huskers could pick more corn more quickly, making the contest almost a foot race through the standing corn. Hybrids increased the chances that a husker might match or break an existing state or national record.[56]

Hybrids allowed four huskers to break the fifty bushel mark in the organized corn husking contests in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Three of these four records were set in county contests, notably in prime cash-grain and livestock feeding areas. In 1938, at the combined Marshall and Putnam County, Illinois, contest, Clarence Endress was the first husker anywhere to go over fifty bushels in an eighty-minute contest. In 1940, Eugene Crouse set the all-time contest record of 53.2 net bushels in the Grundy County, Iowa, contest; in 1941, Leland Klein broke the fifty-bushel mark in Woodford County, Illinois; and Floyd Wise went over fifty bushels in the 1941 Illinois state contest, held in LaSalle County.[57]

Lester Pfister's hybrid Number 164, also known as Hy X 8 single cross, was the corn that made Klein the 1941 champion in Woodford County. The corn was a proven winner; in 1940, Irvin Bauman had broken both the Woodford County and the national corn husking contest records in corn grown from the same strain of seed. Bauman's 1940 achievement of husking

46.58 bushels of corn in eighty minutes stands as the record for the national contests.[58]

The use of hybrid corn in county contests depended more on local farmers than on commercial breeders or experiment stations. By 1939, sixty-eight out of a total of seventy county corn husking contests in Illinois and Indiana were held in hybrid corn, according to a Prairie Farmer survey of county agents and farm advisors. The journal credited this trend to the tendency of hybrid corn to yield better than open-pollinated varieties, to stand up better in the field, and to grow more uniform-sized ears on the stalks. In hybrid corn, a husker knew where to expect the next ear and did not have to waste time searching for it. Occasionally, hybrid corn was used in a county contest a year or two before it was used in a state contest, as happened in Missouri in 1938 when Lafayette County held its county husking contest in hybrid corn, while the first Missouri state contest held in a hybrid field apparently occurred in 1939.[59]

In 1939, all six Iowa district contests were held in hybrid corn. Wallaces' Farmer compared the hybrid contest fields with the open-pollinated contest fields, noting that in the fields of ten years earlier, the huskers often had to wade through a jungle of down corn and sometimes get down on their knees to find the corn. Hybrids helped improve scores in the husking contests because the huskers had better corn to work in.[60]

The pattern of farmer's adoption of hybrid corn was by no means even, steady, or regular, even within a given county, and the contests helped farmers compare the advantages of hybrids against open-pollinated varieties. In 1941, Roberts County, South Dakota hosted both the county contest and the state contest. The county contest field was planted to an open-pollinated variety that yielded about forty-five bushels to the acre; contest winner Emmet Ziemer husked 15.03 bushels under ideal weather conditions. For the state contest, farm owner August Weiser planted a Jacqueis variety of hybrid corn that yielded about fifty bushels per acre.

The uniformity of the corn throughout the field made the contest very close and suspenseful, but the damp air made the corn break hard, which handicapped the huskers and kept their scores low. Nevertheless, champion Ernest Torkelson of Lincoln County, husked 22.75 bushels in eighty minutes, thus demonstrating the superiority of hybrid corn over open-pollinated, even in less than perfect weather.[61]

By the late-1930s, the corn husking contests had become an established midwestern harvest event, and most people expected them to continue indefinitely. Planning and field preparation for the 1942 round of contests had already begun when the contest were unexpectedly suspended in early 1942. In Iowa, for example, three farmers in Dallas County had carefully planted their field for the state contest with hybrid seed obtained from the Moews-Lowe hybrid company of Illinois, a variety, incidently, also grown for the 1941 central Iowa district contest, where it had yielded over ninety bushels per acre. While these fields could not be used for the organized husking contests, they stood as silent reminders of the esteem in which farmers placed the use of scientific technology.[62]

By demonstrating the changing corn-growing technology, the annual corn husking contest both helped spread awareness of tractors, mechanical pickers, rubber tires, and hybrid corn, and they reflected the rate and pattern of their adoption. Hybrid corn had more of a direct impact on the contests than any other innovation because it changed some characteristics of the plant, making it more uniform and weather-resistant in the field. While the use of tractors and mechanical pickers were demonstrated at the contests, the real contribution of these innovations to corn farming was when a tractor pulled and operated a picker and replaced human labor. Promoters of industrial agriculture, from farm journal editors, to tractor and equipment manufacturers, seed corn breeders, and town organizations, used and perpetuated the contests to promote new products and methods, but

ultimately, the interest and experimentation by local farmers incorporated these changes into actual farming practices.

Notes

1. Allan G. Bogue, in "Changes in Mechanical and Plant Technology: The Corn Belt, 1910-1940," Journal of Economic History 43, no. 1 (March 1983): 1-25, identifies tractors, mechanical pickers, and hybrid corn as the major technological innovations of the 1930s. For further discussion of the increased use of tractors and mechanical pickers in the Midwest during the 1930s, see E. M. Diffenbach and R. B. Gray, "Power in the Present: The Development of the Tractor," Power to Produce: Yearbook of Agriculture, 1960 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 25-45; Robert E. Ankli, "Horses vs. Tractors on the Corn Belt," Agricultural History 54, no. 1 (January 1980): 134-48. For discussion of the development of hybrid corn, see Henry A. Wallace and William L. Brown, Corn and its Early Fathers (1956; revised, Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988); Martin L. Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests and Related Later Programs (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1962).

2. Wallaces' Farmer, 28 November 1924, 3; Prairie Farmer, 5 December 1925, 8.

3. Prairie Farmer, 6 November 1926, 5; 20 November 1926, 3; [Platte City] Landmark, 22 November 1929; [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 5 November 1931. For the use of teams at other national contests, see Mankato Daily Free Press, 15 November 1927; [Fowler] Benton Review, 8 November 1928.

4. Norton Daily Telegram, 13 November 1930; 15 November 1930.

5. Prairie Farmer, 12 November 1932, 3; 26 November 1932, 3; Galva News, 10 November 1932, 10.

6. West Point Republican, 19 October 1933; 9 November 1933; 11 November 1933.

7. Diffenbach and Gray, "The Development of the Tractor," 35-36; West Point Republican, 9 November 1933.

8. For plans for the Goodyear Blimp to fly over national contests, see Galva News, 10 November 1932; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 3 October 1934, 3; [Davenport] Democrat, 16 October 1940, 9; Prairie Farmer, 15 November 1941, 7.

9. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 24 November 1934, 11; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 7 November 1934, 5, 7; 9 November 1934, 4.

10. Wallaces' Farmer, 21 November 1936, 3; Newark Advocate, 8 October 1936; Diffenbach and Gray, "The Development of the Tractor," 36.

11. One example of corn weighed on the farm in an early contest occurred in 1927 on the Clark Main farm in Knox County, Illinois, see Prairie Farmer, 19 November 1927. Ohio Farmer, 11 November 1933, 5; Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 9 November 1935, 13.

12. Prairie Farmer, 29 October 1932, 3; Ohio Farmer, 12 November 1932, 6; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 25 October 1934, 3; Farmer, 13 October 1934, 5; 24 November 1934, 3. [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 1 November 1938; 2 November 1938. Marion Star, 22 October 1940.

13. Lawrence Daily Journal-World, 21 October 1939; 26 October 1939, 3-A; 27 October 1939.

14. Prairie Farmer, 23 November 1935, 1; [Davenport] Democrat, 16 October 1940, 9.

15. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 24 November 1934, 3; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 2 October 1934.

16. Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 25 October 1934, 11; Lafayette Journal and Courier, 7 November 1935; [Princeton] Bureau County Republican, 24 October 1940.

17. Farmer, 24 November 1934, 3; Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 9 November 1934, 2.

18. Ohio Farmer, 20 November 1937, 2; Prairie Farmer, 8 October 1938, 8; Lawrence Daily Journal-World, 26 October 1939, 1-A; Wallaces' Farmer, 19 October 1940, 1; Prairie Farmer, 20 September 1941, 1.

19. Prairie Farmer, 12 November 1932, 3; Kansas Farmer, 9 October 1937, 1; Ohio Farmer, 23 October 1937, 7; [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 10 October 1939, 16.

20. In Illinois the number of farms with tractors increased from 31 percent in 1930 to 52 percent in 1940, while in Iowa, the number of farms with tractors rose from 30 percent in 1930 to about 55 percent in 1940, Bureau of the Census, "Agriculture: The Northern States," Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 vol. II, part 1 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), table XII; Bureau of the Census, "Agriculture: State Reports," Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 vol. I, parts 1, 2 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), table X. Metamora Herald, 25 October 1935; Prairie Farmer, 23 November 1935, 10; Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 26 October 1935, 7.

21. Farmer, 24 October 1936, 5; Prairie Farmer, 6 November 1937. Marion Star, 19 October 1940, 7; 22 October 1940. Ohio Farmer, 19 October 1940, 1; Metamora Herald, 23 October 1936; Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 15 November 1941, 12.

22. Statistical estimates derived from census tables, "Agriculture: The Northern States," Fifteenth Census, table XII; "Agriculture: State Reports," Sixteenth Census, table X. The Ohio Farmer annually published a list of Ohio counties planning to hold husking contests, and the type of contest, from 1931 to 1941, see Ohio Farmer, 3 October 1931, 6; 15 October 1932, 7; 16 September 1933, 6; 12 October 1934, 6; 12 October 1935, 5; 26 September 1936, 4; 25 September 1937, 6; 24 September 1938, 3; 23 September 1939, 8; 19 October 1940, 3; 4 October 1941, 2. [Lawrence] Daily Journal-World, 4 November 1939.

23. Statistical estimates derived from census tables, "Agriculture:

The Northern States," Fifteenth Census, table IV; "Agriculture: State Reports," Sixteenth Census, table IV.

24. Statistical estimates derived from census tables, "Agriculture: The Northern States," Fifteenth Census, table IV; "Agriculture: State Reports," Sixteenth Census, table IV. Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1941, 30.

25. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 13 November 1931. Ohio Farmer, 7 November 1936, 7; 6 November 1937, 5, 8; 4 November 1939, 6; 18 October 1941, 5. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 9 October 1937, 1; [Lawrence] Daily Journal-World, 8 November 1939, 2.

26. Ohio Farmer, 24 September 1938, 3; 21 October 1939, 5; 2 November 1940, 5. Marion Star, 19 October 1940; Prairie Farmer, 20 September 1941, 1.

27. Ohio Farmer, 22 November 1930, 2; 12 November 1932, 6. Marion Star, 19 October 1940, 1.

28. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 1 November 1930, 10.

29. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 27 October 1934, 5; Prairie Farmer, 20 November 1937, 15.

30. Wallace and Brown, Corn and its Early Fathers, 74, 83; Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 75; Farmer, 20 October 1928, 7.

31. Wallace and Brown, Corn and its Early Fathers, 72-74, 81-85; Richard A. Crabb, The Hybrid Corn-Makers: Prophets of Plenty (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1947), 25; "The Story of Reid's Yellow Dent Corn," Prairie Farmer, 20 January 1923, 3.

32. Wallace and Brown, Corn and its Early Fathers, 74-76; Mosher, Early Iowa Corn Yield Tests, 75-89. Lester Pfister supplied seed corn for the 1934 and 1935 Woodford county husking contests (Metamora Herald, 26 October 1934; 18 October 1935), for the 1935 Illinois state contest (Metamora Herald, 8 November 1935), for the 1940 Woodford county contest (Metamora Herald, 27 September 1940), and for the 1940 national contest held near Davenport, Iowa, ([Princeton] Bureau County Republican, 24

October 1940). Eugene Funk supplied Funk's Yellow Dent for the 1927 Illinois contest (Prairie Farmer, 5 November 1927, 5) and Funk's F1 hybrid for the 1930 Illinois state contest (Prairie Farmer, 1 November 1930, 5). Henry A. Wallace supplied contest seed corn for the corn husking contests held in his fields, from 1922 through 1924; the variety in not known, but was probably Reid's Yellow Dent. In 1929, Wallace supplied an unnamed hybrid for the state contest in Cedar County (Wallaces' Farmer, 11 October 1929, 3); in 1931, Wallace donated some Pioneer Hi-bred's Baker's 164 for the national contest, see Henry A. Wallace to Lou Plager, 2 March 1931, Henry A. Wallace Papers at the University of Iowa Libraries, ed. Earl M. Rogers (Iowa City: University of Iowa Libraries, 1975), Ia6-169, hereafter cited as HAW Papers.

33. Wallaces' Farmer, 29 December 1922, 5.

34. Wallaces' Farmer, 22 December 1922, 7; 23 November 1923, 4; 5 December 1924, 9. Prairie Farmer, 5 November 1927, 5; 27 October 1928, 3. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 20 October 1928, 7.

35. Bryce Ryan, "A Study in Technological Diffusion," Rural Sociology 13 (September 1948): 275, 280.

36. Farmer and Farm Stock and Home, 13 October 1934, 5; 10 October 1936, 7. Wisconsin Agriculturalist and Farmer, 21 September 1940.

37. Prairie Farmer, 1 November 1930, 5; 17 October 1931, 5; 29 October 1932, 3; 16 September 1933, 3; 13 October 1934, 2; 12 October 1935, 3; 26 September 1936, 4.

38. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 14 October 1933, 5; Ohio Farmer, 23 October 1937, 7; Prairie Farmer, 22 October 1938, 6; Higginsville Advance, 20 October 1939. For Nebraska's first hybrid husking contests, see Leonard J. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards: Complete Digest of Corn Husking Records (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1975), 162; Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 21 September 1940, 2.

39. Wallace to Plager, 2 March 1931, HAW Papers, Ia6-169; Wallace to Plager, 15 April 1931, HAW Papers, Ia58-648.

40. W. A. Reckers to Henry A. Wallace, 21 April 1931, HAW Papers, Ia58-665; C. S. Macy, "Grundy County, 1931," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Agricultural Agents: Iowa, Cooperative Extension Service (Ames: Iowa State College, 1913-1968), 35-36, Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, hereafter cited as County Agents' Reports: Iowa; [Grundy Center] Grundy Republican, 16 July 1931; 24 September 1931.

41. Prairie Farmer, 15 October 1932, 7; Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 26 November 1932, 3; Galva News, 10 November 1932, 10; Ohio Farmer, 26 November 1932, 4.

42. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 13 October 1934, 5; 27 October 1934, 5-6. Fairmont Daily Sentinel, 7 November 1934, 2.

43. Nebraska Farmer, 30 September 1933, 2; West Point Republican, 9 November 1933, 1, 4; Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 4 November 1939, 24.

44. Farmer and Farm, Stock, and Home, 23 November 1935, 7; Prairie Farmer, 21 November 1936, 28.

45. Leonard Steele, "The Hybrid Corn Industry in the United States," Maize Breeding and Genetics, ed. D. B. Walden (New York: Wiley Interceience, 1978), 29, quoted in Jack Ralph Kloppenburg Jr., First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 93; G. F. Sprague and J. C. Cunningham, "Growing the Bumper Corn Crop," A Century of Farming in Iowa, 1846-1946 (Ames: Iowa State College, 1946), 40-41.

46. Columbus Dispatch, 8 November 1936, 1-B; 10 November 1936, A-3.

47. Columbus Dispatch, 8 November 1936, 1-B; 10 November 1936, A-3. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 21 November 1936, 9; Prairie Farmer, 21 November 1936, 1.

48. Kansas City Star, 4 November 1937; Missouri Ruralist, 13 November 1937, 6; Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 20 November 1937, 10.

49. Prairie Farmer, 20 November 1937, 14; Kansas City Star, 4 November 1937; Jacobs, Battle of the Bangboards, 129-30.

50. Kansas Farmer and Mail and Breeze, 4 November 1939, 24; Prairie Farmer, 18 November 1939, 4.

51. Ohio Farmer, 7 November 1936, 46.

52. Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1941, 36-7; Sprague and Cunningham, "Growing A Bumper Corn Crop," 40.

53. [Davenport] Democrat, 5 September 1940; 22 October 1940; Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 19 October 1940, 9.

54. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 19 October 1940, 9.

55. Prairie Farmer, 18 October 1941, 30; 15 November 1941, 1, 13.

56. [Sioux Falls] Daily Argus-Leader, 31 October 1938; Lawrence Daily Journal-World, 4 November 1939; [Davenport] Democrat, 5 September 1940; Prairie Farmer, 21 October 1939, 4.

57. Jacobs, Battle of the Bangboards, 237.

58. Metamora Herald, 1 November 1940; 3 October 1941; Jacobs, Battle of the Bangboards, 166.

59. Eighty-six counties were queried in the survey, but only seventy replied. Only one contest in each state, out of thirty-two contests in Indiana and thirty-eight in Illinois, was held in open-pollinated corn, Prairie Farmer, 23 September 1939, 7. Higginsville Advance, 14 October 1938; 20 October 1939.

60. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 4 November 1939, 11.

61. Elmer Sanderson, "Roberts County, 1941," Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Agents: South Dakota T888 R57 (Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1913-1944), 22-23.

62. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 14 July 1942, 14.

CONCLUSION

Toward the end of the 1930s, annual attendance at national corn husking contests regularly exceeded one hundred thousand visitors, and attendance at county and state contests remained steady; when the number of people who worked in the contests is included, the total number of midwesterners involved is significant. The corn husking contests regularly attracted as many, or more, people as state fairs and football games. In 1939, the Ohio Farmer reported that between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand Ohioans participated in the approximately twenty-five county contests held that year. Several hundred of this number were actively in competition, several thousand worked on committees or as officials, and the rest visited the contests as spectators. In South Dakota, five thousand people showed up for the 1940 South Dakota state contest, held in Deuel County.[1]

Although the corn husking contests remained a popular form of popular entertainment, farmers themselves were beginning to lose interest in entering the contests, preparing contest fields, and forming work committees, especially in the counties where mechanical picking was becoming prevalent. In 1940, interest in organizing local contests lagged in some areas. Some contest organizers thought that the weather might be partly to blame for the noted lack of interest in county contests. In 1940, the late spring put the corn crop in eastern Iowa and northwestern Illinois about three weeks behind normal and corn husking on farms was slow to get started. National contest organizers were particularly concerned about the late harvest because they had scheduled the contest for 30 October, the earliest date ever for a national contest. Moreover, the national was to be held in Davenport, Iowa, where the corn was maturing slowly.[2]

Due to lack of contest talk and organizing activity, a few county agents believed that farmers had lost interest in the contests. During the first week in October, 1940, the Farm Bureau of Knox County, Illinois,

announced that it would not hold a county contest that year because of the difficulty in securing a field and the apparent lack of interest. The agent attributed the lack of interest to the widespread use of mechanical pickers in the county. After the corn harvest had begun, however, Knox County farmers began to ask the agent about holding a contest, so the Farm Bureau changed its plans and decided to hold a contest after all.[3]

Henry County, Illinois, faced the same situation, but Farm Bureau officials were reluctant to cancel because of the county's longtime involvement in the contests. At that time, Henry County held the Illinois record for the longest string of county corn husking contests, unbroken since 1924. Four state champions hailed from Henry County, more than from any other Illinois county. In eighteen years of national contests, from 1924 through 1941, the county had sent a husker to almost every state contest. The first exception occurred in 1930 when Henry County sent two huskers to the state contest, the state defending champion Harold Holmes and county contest winner Ed Cauwels. The second exception occurred in 1941, when for the first time, the winner of the Henry County contest did not place among the top fifteen huskers in the state and was not invited to the contest. The county had hosted both the 1928 state contest and the 1932 national contests. Many county residents had participated in the contests and benefitted from them, directly and indirectly.[4]

By late September, the Henry County Farm Bureau committee felt compelled to warn local huskers that unless sufficient interest was shown soon for a contest, none would be held that year. Farmers with suitable fields were urged to contact the Farm Bureau office as soon as possible. The warning did not go unheeded. By the middle of October, when husking season was fully underway, some twenty-four Henry county men had signed up for the contest, making it necessary to hold a preliminary contest to narrow the field to ten huskers.[5]

Although the weather contributed to the general lack of interest in organizing the county contests in the cash grain and livestock feeding

areas, the biggest reason was that machine picking was rapidly replacing hand picking, and the contests were no longer directly relevant to farming practices. The counties where the corn husking contests had begun the earliest were among the first to discontinue them. These counties were some of the most progressive in the Corn Belt, whose farmers typically responded favorably to suggestions that they try to improve their efficiency in all aspects of their farm work. In October 1941, the Bureau County, Illinois, Farm Bureau board of directors announced that it would discontinue its sponsorship of the annual county corn husking contest. The board of directors cited the fact that, for several years, the public had not been supporting a contest as it had earlier. "Mechanical pickers are used to such an extent that not many of the contestants are doing much hand picking and since help is scarce farmers are extremely busy," and so the county ended it corn husking contests. The Rock Island County, Illinois, Farm Bureau reached the same decision and ended its corn husking contests that year also.[6]

In 1941, the Grundy Register reported that fewer huskers wanted to enter the county contest than in former years when eight to ten huskers were common in the annual events. In early October, so few men had applied for a contest berth that it would not have been worth the effort to plan a contest. Editor J. J. Vanderwicken encouraged more men to apply, warning that unless at least six men applied, no contest would be held. The editor noted that in recent years husking machines had crowded out hand husking and interest in the husking contests had slowed down. Vanderwicken hoped that the annual contests would be continued because they were great sport and had attracted increasing public interest each passing year.[7]

Although the corn husking contests were losing the support of farmers in the cash grain and livestock raising areas of the Corn Belt, the fringe corn producing areas, especially in the western corn belt, continued their strong support for the husking contests. In 1941 in Roberts County, South Dakota, for example, fifteen men competed in the county contest, and

twenty-two competed in the state contest. Plenty of public officials were on hand to work the crowd, including Senator E. I. Stavig, who served as the general chairman of the contest and the Master of Ceremonies on the afternoon program, Joe Bottum, Director of the South Dakota Division of Taxation, South Dakota Secretary of State Olie Ringsrud, President Lyman Jackson of the State College, A. M. Aberle, Dean of Agriculture at the State College, and A. N. Hume, Head of the Agronomy Department.[8]

Although the corn husking contests were losing support, the corn yield contests continued to generate interest in the cash grain and livestock raising regions. In 1941, Grundy Register editor Vanderwicken announced that the Farm Bureau would again sponsor the state Ten-Acre Yield Contest in connection with the Four-County Fair and the Iowa Corn and Small Grain Association. County farmers entered fourteen ten-acre fields in the state contest and thirty-one in the county contest. Grundy County corn growers had been winning the Four-County contest for a number of years and hoped to do so again in 1941.[9]

The 1941 national was the last organized contest, held one month before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. In a way, the bombing provided an uncontestable excuse to end the contests and to silence the possible objections from all the groups that had built up a vested interest in their continuation. The United States Office of Defense Transportation requested that all fairs and meetings that brought people over long distances in automobiles be canceled in an effort to conserve rubber, and the farm papers readily cooperated. In its announcement of suspension of the contests, Wallaces' Farmer promised to revive the contests after the war, along with the county and state fairs, the Farm Bureau's sports festival and other farm gatherings.[10]

After the war, however, there really was not much interest in reviving the contests. The demise of hand husking in the most heavily mechanized areas of the central corn belt appears to be the major reason that the contests were not resumed. During the war, corn harvesting became almost

entirely mechanized, especially on the large, progressive farms that had eagerly hosted the contests in the past. Many of the farm journals continued to support other types of contests and agricultural field days within their own state, but the original, personal relations existing between farm journal editors, agricultural associations, land-grant college personnel, county agents, and farmers had slipped away. The men whose interest in progressive agriculture had prompted them to introduce and promote the contests had moved on to other things. Henry A. Wallace, after serving as Secretary of Agriculture and U.S. Vice-President, had retired to a farm in New York state. Clifford Gregory had moved to the farm paper syndicate which published Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead and the Wisconsin Agriculturalist in 1937 after a breakdown of relations with Prairie Farmer publisher Burridge D. Butler. Gregory, perhaps the biggest promoter of corn husking as a community affair, died unexpectedly in 1941 from complications related to an appendicitis operation. Samuel McKelvie had retired from farm journalism in 1935.[11]

Elements of the contests continued in forms centered in towns. Even though the contests had not created these forms and was only one expression of them, the contests did bring them all together in time and place. Farm equipment companies continued to combine education, demonstration, and entertainment in their sales programs. In 1940, for example, the Galva Farm Equipment Company sponsored a "Power Farming Day," in which company representatives demonstrated new Farmall tractors in the morning and sponsored a motion picture in the afternoon at the local theater to show Farmall tractors in operation under various conditions and with different equipment. Retail merchants continued their Main Street trade events, such as "Bonus Days" in Galva, Illinois. Bonus Days were to be held every Saturday night during spring, summer, and fall to encourage area residents to shop at participating merchants.[12]

Agricultural contests and demonstrations from the late 1940s through the 1960s used many of the organizational and promotional techniques

introduced in small towns and rural areas in conjunction with the national corn husking contests. One contest, the National Plowing Matches, continued the emphasis on modern, industrialized agriculture. Herb Plambeck, a farm announcer with WHO radio station in Des Moines, Iowa, later recalled that in the late-1930s he became aware that within a short period of time husking would be entirely mechanized and the corn husking contests would end. Plambeck wanted to continue the "color, drama, and fun" of the contest, and give farmers "something of their own" where they could be "King For a Day" and where agriculture would be in the national spotlight. Plambeck decided that a national plowing match would suit the purpose, plus give attention to better land use. WHO radio invited the winners of the Wick, Wheatland, Pilot Rock, and other plowing matches to a capstone contest.[13]

The first national plowing match was held at Mitchellville, Iowa, in 1939 on invitation of local and civic groups and area farmers. The matches were sponsored by WHO radio station, and as such were always held in Iowa. Eight thousand people attended the first match. Similarities with the corn husking contests included fencing the contest lands to keep the crowd out, a time limit on the event, a live radio broadcast, the presence of politicians and dignitaries, in this case the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Iowa, the selection of a "Queen of the Furrow," machinery demonstrations and displays, and the support of civic and community groups. The plowing matches were different than the corn husking contests in one respect, however; women were allowed to participate in same contest as the men. In the 1941 national plowing match held in Albia, Mrs. William Holmstrom of Illinois drove a tractor in the contest while her husband minded their six-month old baby on the sidelines. Another difference was that while the plowing matches, like the corn husking contests, were suspended during the war, the plowing matches were resumed while the corn husking contests were not.[14]

Throughout their existence, the corn husking contests had been "authentic rural recreation" as Henry A. Wallace had hoped, but the they incorporated the values and behaviors associated with industrial culture more than Wallace would have wished. The early contests had encouraged the voluntary cooperation of organized groups and individual farmers in a joint venture which benefitted no one over the others, yet benefitted everyone involved in progressive Midwest agriculture. The farm journals, the colleges, the extension service, and town organizations each developed ownership of a particular aspect of the contests which they could only use in interaction with the other groups and individuals. Contest structure gave primary control to the state farm journals, but this was tempered by the umbrella agreement of the journals within the Standard Farm Unit and by associational relationships with many organizations. As the contests expanded in size, the need for local planning led to increasing decentralization, allowing communities to bring their unique stamp to the contests within a standard form.

During the 1930s, however, notions of the common good, of prosperity as something that could be enjoyed by all was undermined by overwhelming commercial presence at the state and national contests in the late 1930s. The ritual that had expressed interdependent relationships of cooperation seemed to now represent rigid areas of power and influence, for the seed corn companies, for machinery manufacturers, for farm journals, for county agents, for scientists and technicians at state colleges of agriculture, and for champion farmers who sought to cash in on their notoriety. Supplying corn farming was becoming big business, and instead of working together to create a large common good, the parts were balkanizing in order to reap their own reward instead of cooperating with others.

The irony of the situation was that the manufacturers, the media, the journals, town businessmen, and all the other interests relied on the willingness of farmers to volunteer for the actual work of the contests, which gave rural residents ultimate control over the life and death of the

contests. In 1924 Henry A. Wallace had written that the true reason for holding state and national contests was to provide a reason for organizing the local contests. Wallace believed that the county contests made a "real social gathering," unlike the larger contests where the crowd became impersonal, rude, and destructive. Without grassroot enthusiasm and support, the contests would simply be too expensive to stage and it was unlikely that such a cooperative arrangement could be negotiated when so much time and expense was required from everyone involved. That perhaps, is the ultimate reason that the corn husking contests ended.[15]

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2. Galva News, 3 October 1940.

3. Galva News, 3 October 1940; 17 October 1940.

4. Galva News, 19 September 1940; 30 October 1941. Leonard J. Jacobs, Corn Huskers' Battle of the Bangboards: Complete Digest of Corn Husking Records, (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1975), 51-52.

5. Galva News, 26 September 1940; 17 October 1940.

6. [Princeton] Bureau County Republican, 2 October 1941; Galva News, 2 October 1941.

7. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 9 October 1941.

8. Elmer Sanderson, "Roberts County, 1941," Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of County Agents: South Dakota T888 R57 (Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Agriculture), 22-23.

9. [Grundy Center] Grundy Register, 9 October 1941.

10. Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead, 11 July 1942, 6.

11. James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer* and WLS: The Burridge D. Butler Years (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 87, 151-52, 210-11; Bruce Hilton Nicoll, Sam McKelvie, Son of the Soil: Sketch of a Self-Reliant American Who Cheerfully Fought His Own Battles (Lincoln, Neb.: Johnsen Publishing Company, 1954), 33-37, 111-26.

12. Galva News, 15 February 1940; 28 March 1940.

13. Herb Plambeck, "This is Herb:" With Never a Dull Moment, 4th ed., rev. (Ames, Iowa: Sigler Printing and Publishing, 1994); William Peterson, "State and Interstate Matches," Palimpsest, 418.

14. Peterson, "State and Interstate Matches," 423.

15. Wallaces' Farmer, 5 December 1924, 9.

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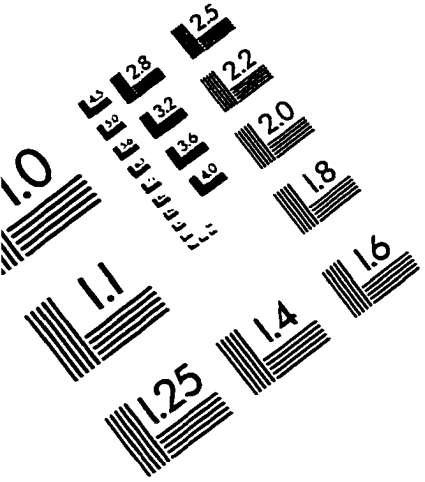

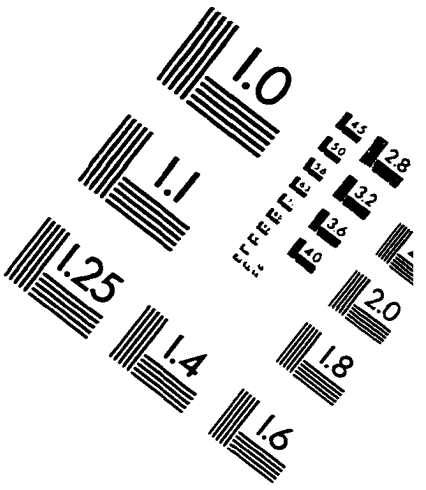

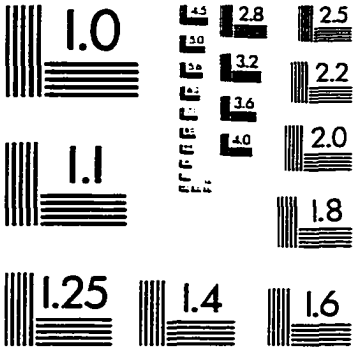

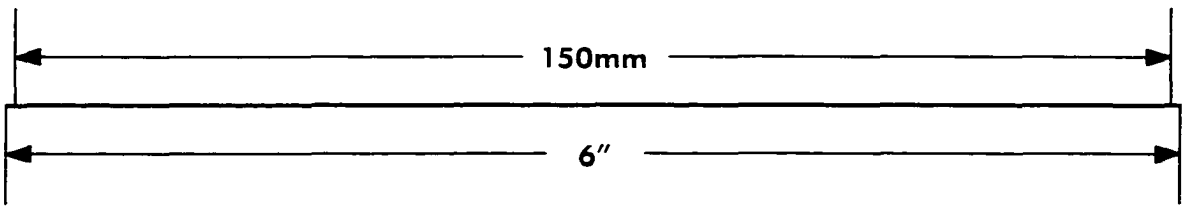

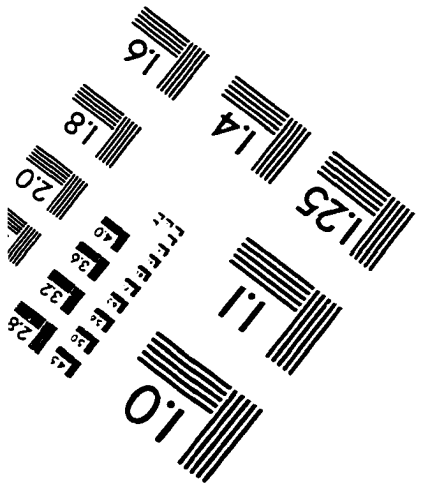

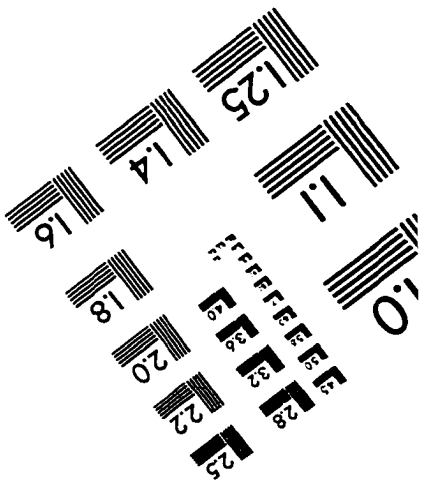

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