
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 338

1929 August 28

Syracuse, NY - Farm Dinner

At Annual Farm Dinner of Jerome D. Barnum, Syracuse, N. Y.,
August 28, 1929

Future of Farming in State of New York

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At the opening of the new bridge across Lake Champlain on Monday, one of the Vermont floats in the parade depicted on one end a prosperous western farm family, the center of public attention and solicitude, and on the other end a Vermont farm group hard at work amid rocks and stones, forgotten by public opinion. The easy lot of the western farmer was certainly exaggerated, but it is undoubtedly true that the lot of the farmers of the East would be vastly better today, if their problems had received one-half of the public attention which has been given to their co-workers in the western states.

I am happy to say that without much doubt the State of New York is taking the lead in the East in studying the needs of agriculture and the improvement of the conditions of life which surround the several millions of our citizens who live in the farming counties of the State. Many people, especially in our cities, have an idea that the farming problem is confined to the wheat and cotton belt of the West or the cotton belt of the South. This, of course, is not true as any automobile trip through any of our eastern states will prove to the most casual observer. Every year that passes farms continue to be abandoned in this and other eastern states. In my trips through the State this summer, traveling almost six thousand miles and visiting almost every one of the fifty-seven counties outside of Greater New York, I have been forced to compare the conditions as I find them with those that existed when I first traveled through the State twenty or more years ago. We have a very real problem and it is a problem that confronts not only the farmers themselves but at least to an equal extent the business men of the State and those who are wage earners in the cities of the State.

I recall, for example, one very lovely old lady who came down to the canal to see me at a place called Montezuma. She was a fine woman, eighty years old, and had lived on a large and formerly prosperous farm ever since her father had brought her to the central part of the State on the old Erie Canal when she was three weeks old. On that farm she had raised a large family in comfort but today, in her declining years, she struggles to make both ends meet. This example is, I am sorry to say, typical of thousands of acres which two generations ago provided a prosperous livelihood for an intelligent and progressive population.

I will not recite to you the steps which, at the suggestion of the Governor's Agricultural Advisory Commission, have already been taken to relieve farmers of some of the unjust tax burdens, nor of other steps which might be called emergencies to equalize the burdens more satisfactorily.

The ultimate goal is, socially and economically, briefly stated. It is to arrive at the day when the average farmer in this State will be assured of as good living conditions and as much earning power in the average year as the skilled mechanic or small business man in the cities of the State.

I want tonight to discuss an economic trend which I believe to be on the way and which is sound, both from the point of view of geography and the point of view of economics.

It is perfectly true that this is one great Nation in which we live, yet we are apt to look at some of the economic features of our life too little from the regional viewpoint.

Let me cite an example of what I mean. The six million people in the City of New York are the daily users of hundreds of thousands of quarts of milk and cream. Modern medical science requires that that milk and cream be pure and free from dangerous bacteria from the moment of its production to the moment of its consumption by the man, woman or child in the city. That requires inspection by the city health authorities of the source of supply, i. e. the individual farms where the milk and cream is produced. Two years ago the Health Commissioner of New York City adopted the very wise and practical business policy of confining the area to which his inspectors could go to points within a reasonable distance of New York City, eliminating thereby costly and time-consuming visits to scattered individual farms through a dozen States of the middle west.

Thus was created what is known as the "New York Milkshed." It includes the whole of the State of New York and a few nearby points in New Jersey, northern Pennsylvania and Vermont. The New York City inspectors thus have only a homogeneous, easily-reached district to cover and the cost of this governmental function has been put on a practical business basis.

At the same time every effort is being made by the Dairymen's League and other co-operating agencies to bring the milk and cream production of this area up to the needs of New York City and to keep the production up to the necessary maximum from year to year.

This is sound economics for two reasons. It means that the elimination of western milk and cream will prevent extreme fluctuations in the cost of milk and cream to the individual user in New York City, and secondly, it means that farmers engaged in the production of milk will be assured of a definite market year in and year out.

By the same token, it is good economics for the western farmer, for if the same practice is established in the cities of the middle west, the western farmer, through proper co-operation, will build up the same kind of stabilized market in the cities of his own vicinity such as exists in New York today.

In addition to all of this the consumer, both in the West and in the East, is assured of fresher and safer milk and the railroads can make great operating savings in having definite shipping schedules instead of fluctuating hit-or-miss methods that existed in transportation up to the time this splendid step was taken.

What I am driving at is this. If the cities of New England, the city of Philadelphia, the city of Baltimore and other centers of the East could carry out the same method of the encouragement and maintenance of a local and nearby milk-shed, the dairy industry throughout the eastern states in a very few years could automatically be stabilized.

Now, if this principle can be successfully applied to milk and cream, and I am glad to say other cities and states are following our lead, why in the name of common sense can it not be applied to other agricultural products which are locally used? If we can have a successful milk-shed, why should we not have a successful vegetable-shed? I do not of course refer to the out-of-season vegetables which have necessarily a nation-wide distribution. For instance, in the Spring of the year thousands of carloads of vegetables come to northern and western cities from the South several weeks before those same vegetables can ripen in the North. I refer of course to the seasons in which vegetables come to maturity in our own individual localities.

What, for instance, is the economic use in the spectacle in huge dump scows being towed down New York Harbor and out to sea for the purpose

of throwing overboard dozens of carloads of cabbages which have come to the New York City market from the eastern and middle western states and in many cases the far western states, all arriving the same day and in such quantities that they could only be consumed, if the six million people in New York all decided to eat corned beef and cabbage three meals a day for a week. The growers of those unfortunate cabbages blame the commission merchants when they get no return and are out of pocket for the shipping charges, but the fault lies not with the commission merchants but with the lack of planning by the communities and the growers as a whole.

The manufacturer of shoes or the producer of automobiles does not send a train load lot of shoes or automobiles to the New York market or any other large city on consignment in the fond hope that he can sell them in forty-eight hours. Why should vegetable growers and vegetable dealers and the vegetable consuming public lay down another and different rule?

The next practical step for us to take is to devise means by which, for example, the vegetable supply of the cities of New York State will be placed on a state-wide basis. This can be arrived at only by co-operation between the city-dwelling public on the one side and the vegetable growing farmers on the other.

Another example, permit me to offer. The same proposition applies to fruit. Nobody would expect us in the East to limit in any way the shipping of early peaches or grapes from the further South before our own fruit is ripe. Nevertheless, when our own fruit is ripe it is an economic waste for us to be bringing in fruit, of no better grade or quality, from other sections of the country.

We all know the story of the Oregon apple. We must take off our hats to the energy and salesmanship of our friends in Oregon and Washington who have created a demand in our New York State cities for apples which have to be transported three thousand miles. The story of the success of the western apple is well known in every eastern city in spite of the knowledge that we can, if we want to, raise equally fine and perhaps better tasting apples in our own orchards.

One trouble is, of course, that too many thousands of farmers in the East continue to flood the local markets with inferior, under-sized, badly packed apples, with the result that the average retail merchant prefers to handle the product from the Pacific Coast, because the buying public wants something that looks good as well as tastes good.

If we could build up the same co-operative interest among the apple growers of the State of New York as we have succeeded in building up among the dairy farmers, we would soon be able to establish an apple-shed for the cities of our State.

In all of this work of regional planning for the production and consumption of agricultural products, we need the same co-operation from business men as they are now giving to city and suburban planning. We need their study in conjunction with farmers of the physical and material needs of marketing. We need their interest in the building up of common-sense pride in the use of our own products.

Over in New England the organization known as the New England Conference has already accomplished great things in teaching the average citizen to prefer to use the products of New England rather than to buy articles which are no better but which happen to be made in totally different sections of the country.

I am confident that the theory of regional planning for the more local use of all future situations is economically sound. It will result, in the long run, in a more stabilized price, in the prevention of over-production, in the more permanent employment of labor, in the saving of transportation, duplication and waste, and in a better understanding between the city and farm populations.

I look for the day when, throughout the length and breadth of the United States, zones will be established for the production and consumption of whatever the soil within that zone is best fitted to raise and whatever the local demands of consumption require. Let us not forget that the prosperity of the country, both state and national, is dependent as much on the prosperity of the agricultural population as on the prosperity of the city dweller.

If the farming population does not have sufficient producing power to buy new shoes, new clothes, new automobiles, the manufacturing centers must suffer. It is time for us, who are in business or in Governmental positions, to regard this task as our own and to realize that the farm problem is not confined to wheat, corn and cotton. Much can still be done to equalize the burden of taxation, to meet the waste which undoubtedly exists in local government and to reduce other economic burdens such as the inequality of the tariff in its relation to the farmer. But in the final analysis, we need, more than anything else, a definite determination on the part of the business men, of the city dwellers and of the agricultural population to join hands in creating a permanent basis of production, transportation, sale and consumption in which the natural economic laws will take precedence.