
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Syracuse, NY - Farm Relief Program

At Dinner Given by Jerome D. Barnum, Syracuse, September 3,
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Farm Relief Program

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At this dinner of men who represent every known interest in agriculture in the State of New York, I want to express my own gratitude and that of the agricultural population of the State for the splendid teamwork and cooperation which you have given during the past year and a half to the best farm relief program of any State in the Union. What is even more important is that the greater part of this is no longer a program, but has been translated into actual fact and actual law.

These practical accomplishments fall under the following general heads:

1. The burden of local contribution through taxes to the building and upkeep of State and county roads and bridges has been largely eliminated. Furthermore, we have undertaken a definite study of the best methods of building town roads and will soon be in a position to undertake another definite program, with the clear objective of taking the farmers of New York State out of the mud.

2. Another unequal burden has been lifted from our agricultural communities through the extension of State Aid to the one, two and three room schools, putting them on the same basis as the larger schools in cities and incorporated villages.

3. We have given definite recognition to the fact that research is the backbone of agricultural development, through largely increased appropriations for scientific development by the experiment stations, and through appropriations adequately to house the educational work at Cornell, Geneva, Syracuse, and many other places.

It would be easy, in view of these definite achievements during the past year and a half, to lay back on our oars, throw out our chest and stop there. I am convinced, however, that the goal of agricultural achievement in this State is something far higher. We seek to make living conditions on the farms of New York State at least the equal of the best living conditions in any community within our State, and that means that the social development of farm life and the yearly earnings of farm families must be made to equal the conditions and the earnings of the skilled artisans in industrial pursuits. Therefore, we can not be content but must go forward with

the next steps in what, after all, is a program not of two years, but of a whole generation.

As I see the next logical steps for us to take we must

1. Strike out boldly to reduce the present exorbitant spread between what the farmer receives for his produce and what the consumer pays for that same produce. Let me give some concrete examples of what this spread amounts to at the present time. These figures were taken on August 20, 1930, and are approximately correct. The wholesale price in New York City for heavy, live fowls is from 20 to 23 cents, and the retail price is from 35 to 36 cents. This represents a spread of 65 per cent between the wholesale and retail prices. The wholesale price of legs of country dressed veal is 16 to 17 cents a pound; the retail price is 32 to 33 cents a pound, or a spread of 97 per cent. The spread between the wholesale price of potatoes and the retail price is 47 per cent. The spread between the wholesale and retail price of eggs is 41 per cent. Now, it is interesting to note that in all of these cases, the spread between the wholesale price and the retail price in 1930 averages nearly double what it was in August, 1929. That is something for us to think about; it requires the best thought of all of us, city dwellers and farmers alike. But one thing is very certain, and that is that the farmers of the State of New York are neither profiteering nor getting rich on what they are receiving at this time, or for a generation past, for their produce.

Therefore, while we have done much and are doing still more through our highway systems, to bring farm produce to the urban markets, the next two definite steps are the working out of better terminal facilities in the cities and, secondly, a wholly new system of city markets. These two essentials are the key of modern food distribution and it is time to put them both on an up-to-date business basis.

2. Hand in hand with city markets and terminal facilities goes one subject which relates more directly to the farmer himself, and that is the bettering of the existing grading of all kinds of farm produce. Why fool ourselves when we know definitely that in many lines of fruit and produce, other States are sending to market a more uniform and higher quality pack than we ourselves are doing.

In regard to the existing milk situation in the State, there is also need for the definite truth to be known by every family that buys milk. I take it that no dairyman and no consumer objects to activities of government authorities which aim to locate and stop profiteering in food of any kind, but it is also axiomatic that any activities of government officials which force farmers to sell their products below the cost of production, and especially those which lessen public confidence in milk as a food, are wrong and do irreparable damage. If it is a fact that severe drought and other adverse conditions to our dairy farmers justify a raise in the price of milk to them, in order to enable them to make both ends meet, it is wrong for public authorities to try the case in the newspapers first and investigate afterwards.

It is to the best interests of the farmer and of the consumer that the New York milkshed be maintained and encouraged. It is wholly right, however, that every effort be made to prevent retailers of milk from using a very small and absolutely essential emergency increase in the price to the farmer as an excuse for making an additional or an unconscionable profit for the retailers themselves.