
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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**Syracuse, NY - State Fair -
Rural Taxation Relief**

p. 756

At State Fair, Syracuse, September 4, 1930

Rural Taxation Relief

It has been customary for a long line of Governors to come to the great State Fair at Syracuse and speak briefly to the representatives of the agricultural interests who are assembled here from every county in the State. I believe that it has been said at this Fair that the advancement of farming and farm life depends on the farmer himself, and not on action by the Government either at Washington or at Albany. With this theory I must disagree in view of the definite program of government action which has been put into effect in Albany during the past year and a half.

Even before I was inaugurated, and because I was born and brought up in the country, I was very well aware that the State Government, through existing laws, was bearing down in an unjust and unequal manner on the million or more of the citizens of the State who live outside of the cities and larger communities. I knew at first hand that there was a definite discrimination against the rural taxpayers. I knew, also, that for years there had been complicated studies and reports dealing with the revision of tax methods, but that legislators from the rural districts who might have been depended on to produce results had failed to take action. I felt, therefore, that further study was wholly unnecessary and that definite legislation was imperative.

The result speaks for itself. In the short space of a year and a half, the farmers of this State have had lifted from their backs a tax burden which,

if it had continued, would in many instances have bankrupted towns and counties within our borders and driven thousands of families off the farm. The danger of the trend is illustrated by the ten year drop from 183,000 farm families down to 160,000 farm families. The big important fact for us to know is that the carrying out of the program which I laid down in January, 1929, has meant the shifting of approximately \$30,000,000 a year in the tax burden which farm taxpayers were called on to assume. This is made up roughly through the following actions:

First, the State contributes approximately five millions a year additional money to the rural schools.

Second, the counties no longer have to contribute 35 per cent of the cost of State highways or to the cost of State highway bridges.

Third, the counties now have to contribute only 1 per cent instead of 10 per cent toward the cost of grade crossing elimination.

Fourth, the upstate counties are now receiving at least \$6,000,000 dollars from the gasoline tax.

Fifth, most townships will receive about twice as much State aid per mile for dirt roads as they did before.

Sixth, beginning next winter, the State will contribute half the cost of snow removal up to \$50 a mile.

Seven, the half mill Direct State Tax on real estate has been wholly abolished.

To sum up, therefore, and without in any way speaking of the tremendous sums which the State has added last year and this to the scientific and educational work at the experiment stations, at the College of Agriculture and the various other educational institutions of the State, your State Government has at last taken practical action to correct the inequalities of the tax burden.

This is neither the time nor the place for me to speak of other forms of State Assistance. I am very confident, however, that during the next two or three years the State must work, first, to improve the whole system of the marketing of farm produce from the time it leaves the hands of the producer until the time it comes into the kitchen of the consumer. This means better grading and better shipping facilities, and a complete revision of the system of terminal markets and city markets. And hand in hand with this goes the definite obligation of the State to launch a program for better town roads. I believe that you and I very definitely will live to see the day when the farmer of New York State is taken out of the mud. The goal of the State should be to put a hard surface road at the door of and make available electric light and power to every economic farm unit of the State.

But I want to add one final word in regard to the cost of Government to the farmers of New York State. I have pointed out that Albany has taken definite action so that today not one penny, not one dollar of farm taxes goes to Albany itself. Every dollar of your farm taxes today is spent 100 per cent for local government purposes, your county government, your town government, your school district government, your fire district government, if you live in one. These absorb all of the real estate taxes.

The big, important question mark that should be constantly before you is whether you can make savings in these taxes by putting local government on a more businesslike basis. Ask yourself the definite questions as to whether, for example, your town highway taxes are bringing in the best results. Ask yourselves whether voluntary reorganizations of local government will help you or not. It is a fact that year after year committees of the Legislature have studied improvement in local Government with the object of putting it on a more businesslike basis. But it is also a fact that while these committees have again and again made suggestions for improvements, their reports have remained pigeonholed in Albany.

The responsibility for this whole question, it seems to me, lies primarily in your own hands. Personally, I believe that the time for action has come, but this action will not come unless the interest of the individual is definitely aroused.

I hope much that those splendid organizations, the farm bureau, the home bureau, the State and local granges and other disinterested agencies, will give serious and practical attention to this vital problem. If all of us work together toward this end, I am confident that we shall take another important step toward the lifting of New York State agriculture to the highest level of any State in the Union.
