

Int.: Prior to World War I how rapidly or how were county farm bureaus being organized with extension service?

Taff: How rapidly? You'll have to speak a little louder. I have a hearing-aid but it isn't always working very well. You'll wonder why I don't hear everything, but I can't. So, as I understood your question there was how rapidly did they become organized? Well, at that time (the farm bureau) I think we ought to get away from that term for the reason there was no law establishing farm bureaus as such. The farm aid law which was passed in 1912, I believe provided for a county organization to promote agriculture and it set out what the requirements were. The organization had to get at least 200 members at not less than \$5.00 each which raised a thousand dollars and then the county supervisors could legally appropriate \$3,000.00 to set-up this farm aid law, now the law never said that they had to call themselves farm bureau. They could have called themselves, those county organizations, any name and some few did, but most of them called themselves the county farm bureaus, with the county name. I guess better than 90% of them that were organized had called themselves county farm bureau. Now, those organizations in the counties that provided for that appropriation came about rather slowly. The first ones were organized in 1912 and that was when some of the organizations where our staff people here went out as county agents, Mosher and Bliss (that was a cousin of our Director Bliss) and Burger and Blackhawk and so on. Now, from then on they were a little slow in getting organized in the counties, but about 1915 things began to stir up, knowing that we probably would have war and they began to think of it. They ought to have a county set-up which could go along and

help with the war effort which they did, and the last counties organized were in 1918 or in 1918. Now another thing that I think is important to keep in mind is that these organizations at the beginning were concerned almost wholly with educational work in the counties. Demonstration plots, county meetings, farmers institutes, and short courses and all that sort of thing. They were not or they were just might I say interested in for instance legislation some of which was needed at that time. But their primary interest in their activities were all concerned with educational work, county agents became a sort of consultant and they were looked upon as sort of an expert in agriculture and so on.

Int.: They must have had to have a broad range of knowledge--the county agents must have had to have a broad range of knowledge.

Taff: So, I wanted to make that point that they were interested in primarily in education and then of course after I think you were asking some questions about the establishment of the farm bureau. Well, the farm bureaus as such were not established by law. They were established by choice. When they met the requirements of the farm aid law the legislature set up, they were, as I say, sort of the educational arm of the extension service, and they called themselves farm bureau as I already said. Now that is sort of a summary of the background of the start of the farm bureau. Now I hope that that answered your particular question here... Well, the role of the extension service then of course became pretty much an arm of the college--the college it was then--to give these counties help largely through what was then called the county agents and then, we had specialists... You see these county agents when we went out were not specialists.

Neither are they specialists even today as far as that is concerned and they had to have help in educational work; livestock work, soils work, even boys and girls club work was headed-up here. I was state director of boys and girls club work as you probably noticed for about 30 years and I came on that work as state director in 1919, State Leader. Well, we ought have a staff here then began to get built up and of course the war effort increased the activity of the staff a great deal, and we were the source of specialists of health and so on of the University to the college to the farm bureau. That was our relationship. We had nothing to do when they became interested in legislation--that was out of our appeal. Now, I don't know whether I'm answering your question or not the idea of what you would want

Int.: You're doing fine.

Taff: I just said the role of the extension service in the formation--Well, naturally we realize that in order to make our extension work effective there would have to be some county set-up. We couldn't do it from here. What county were you raised in here in this state?

Int.: No, I'm from South Dakota.

Taff: South Dakota. Well, South Dakota was very similar in our situation although they were slower in organizing the farm bureau. A county which didn't have an agent in it between 1912 and 1918; we had no contacts in those counties practically. There were some clubs organized and we used some of those to set-up meetings like farmers institutes and various types of localized meetings, so we were very much interested in having the county set-up a county organization. We didn't determine whether it was to be a farm bureau or something else and there again--

as I say about 90% chose it and as I say later on it was a hundred per cent of course. So, we were interested but we gave some organizational help sometimes to the counties in getting their counties set-up organized there which required raising funds and so on. There's another angle that I think I'll pull in here. I don't know how much Mr. Graff emphasized which I think is very important in your thinking all through this, and that is simply stated the idea that we work with the county farm bureaus primarily and prior to that with people who were already interested in our work. Now, if you'll find in this book (R. K. Bliss' The First Fifty). It's interesting to read a chapter here that had a bearing in this little paragraph. The state federation of farmers clubs was organized here. Now that was done in a number of counties prior to any effort to have a farm bureau and interestingly enough the fellows who were elected. They had a meeting in Des Moines. Wallaces Farmer recorded it and so on. This man who was elected here, Charles Hunt of Logan, was made president of this bureau. Now that was in '19, the state organization of clubs in 1911. Now, should I say an illustration of what I was starting to discuss there was that this man while he was state president of these farmers clubs also became the first president of the Iowa Farm Bureau, so he was a man we worked with and he worked with us and was interested in organizations and he became the first president of the Iowa Farm Bureau in 1918.

Int.: What was he interested in? What did he feel the extension service could do?

Taff: Well, he was a farmer and he had one son and I think two or three nephews here, graduating here at Iowa State. Oh, say, he himself, was a graduate of Iowa State. It states that right here. A graduate

of Iowa State College and a long-time member of the local farmer's club. Now, that local farmer's club was a very active one. I went out and held a short course in his town of Logan in 1914. I forget which it is in February of that year. He was a president of that and he was very active. As a matter of fact there these clubs were all of course. What I'm trying to say simply is that there we found that the people who were the most interested in becoming an organization that could draw public funds in a county, were the same people who organized the farm bureau. Naturally, I think naturally because you couldn't go out here in a county without someone else already being interested. You couldn't force yourself on a county. They had to have some interest in that group which was interested enough to back it and become the leaders as we say. Well, we didn't actually push farm bureau. We were pushing county organizations. That's what I wanted to say. Now, I'm talking too much. You give some of the questions and we'll get through them.

Int.: The war then accelerated this whole project?

Taff: The war. Yes, but see the war didn't start 'til '17 and practically all of the counties were then organized and a few that were not but they immediately got into action and became the county organization and as I say there were about 8 or 10 counties that preferred to call themselves crop improvement associations. I think that's stated in this book here you'll find Cerro Gordo County, Mason City and I don't know, I can't name them all. They preferred, when they came qualified to get this county money \$2,000 and raised \$1,000 through membership, they preferred then to call their county organizations county crop improvement associations, but later on they all turned over to

the farm bureau. Okay. Now, what have you next on your mind?

Int.: When the county farm bureaus were federated into a state organization how did this effect the extension service? Was the extension service with them at all?

Taff: Well, answering the last question first. I would say that this effect the county farm bureau affiliation. Well, I would say no. I would say strengthened it. Naturally as far as what prompted the county farm bureaus to federate I think it was a very natural development. Just about everything you can think of when they have a large number of units which the county farm bureaus were in 1918 was to bring those together into certain programs and things that were needed. The chamber of commerce has the state and county organizations. Even doctors get together. They sometimes have the state organizations. Well, of course, the old saying, I forget who said it, in unity there is strength. I forget who said it. Some old fella did and that was the answer, that they saw an opportunity to become more effective through a state organization, and the same thing could be said of the American Farm Bureau when these states began to organize the state farm bureau. Why it was seen that if those state farm bureaus cooperated together they would be more effective than state farm bureaus trying to do something together in legislation or something of that kind. There was in those days, there was a little cooperative marketing work, too. Later, it became very important livestock marketing and all that. Well, some of them who sponsored those organizations direct and some left the livestock marketing. We did a great deal of work with the counties on that, but it was through the cooperative shipping association. It wasn't through the farm bureau, but the farm bureau people were the actual ones who were interested in and sponsored a lot of those activities. Those were built up later on and there wasn't very much

cooperative market or cooperative buying or anything like that. Sometimes the counties, some of them got together, as I recall, on projects that grew very rapidly along. Well, during the war and right after the beginning we did our demonstrations largely locally. Here the college proved there was a lot of limestone that should be used on all this land because they couldn't grow good yields successfully. In fact they couldn't grow alfalfa hardly at all. They didn't want to do that unless they limed. Well, they had a lot of those limestone supplying organizations and they shipped in car loads and car loads, but of course the membership of the farm bureau was the unit, but didn't do it in the name of the farm bureau. It was the same as the group of people who cooperated and bought up a car load of limestone had it shipped to a certain point in the county and got together went in and took their share of the limestone off the car. Well, that kind of thing was the beginning of the cooperative buying and marketing too. Well, that may be off your subject.

Int.: No, I was going to ask you did the extension service play a big role in this cooperative movement in the United States or during the '20's did the extension service play a role in the cooperative movement in the United States?

Taff: Yes, we had several specialists in, well, you take for instance in the cooperative livestock marketing. That was done here, I think under the name of the first fellow who worked on that his name was Espe. His name hasn't appeared here. No, he doesn't. Well, anyway. You see another thing there was a lot of state organizations of different commodities and they're listed in here, beef producers, a swine producers associations, oh, there was about 8 or 10 of them and the legislators appropriating funds. So these organizations like the livestock producers.

See if that's the page that this is on...214. Marketing livestock and grain. Livestock products. Well, it's in this work somewhere but it would take too long to search it out. We had to put on in order to help these organizations function. Oh, in educational work that they should do among their members in their keeping of records and a lot of those things. We had people who worked with these commodity organizations in a...

Int.: Was it hard to get farmers through?

Taff: Yeah, dairy associations, and that was a very strong organization was dairying. Local dairying. Of course the cattle associations I suppose as you remember are mentioned quite often in here were sponsored by these county dairy associations first, and then we have these specialists who went out and helped them and after they helped them some in getting organized. You see, farmers are pretty lacking in information in how to get together and form an organization. They didn't have much experience in those days. Every farmer was an individual, you might say, and they needed help in getting meetings and having speakers at those meetings. Telling them about the advantage in organizing and all that.

Int.: In other words, they were willing, but they didn't really know how to go about it. Is that... Well, farmers were willing to organize, but they didn't really know how to do it.

Taff: Oh, yeah, they took ahold very quickly. Well, I think without going into too much detail, yes, the shipping associations are spelled out in here pretty thoroughly and this is a good illustration in what they call the county organizations, of course. Now, let's see. Where are we? Getting any place?

Int.: Well, we're doing fine.

Taff: I went way off the track, but I like to talk about this old time activity. I suppose Mr. Graff (Ed), well, you see became a county agent in what it was established in '16 and I think maybe went out that fall in Johnson County, in which Iowa City is in Johnson County, so he was in on that part. I was never a county worker. When I went on the staff here July 8, '12, I went on state extension staff and I was on that ever since. But Mr. Graff knew a lot about these movements that began in the counties such as the livestock shipping association. They get together in July that I spoke of and oh, many things of that kind. Well, let's see, you're gonna have to get me on the track again if... Oh, if you have had any indication through your study of from anyone that we didn't want or that we directly worked for farm bureaus why that was sort of a missnomer. When the county farm bureau, after they they met the legal requirements county farm bureaus became organized. It was that you might say, that that was mandatory that organization that we had to work with quite a bit and not only that but again coming to this old thought that you work with the people who work with you and those were practically always the 200 or more or sometimes the 400 or 500 members in the county where the people have wanted our help from here; wanted the specialists from the farmer's institute to come out and talk about the livestock or soil or what have you.

Int.: Are you the only ones that really...

Taff: Yeah, we work with the people that organized and were willing to work with us. Now, let's see where were we. Is there anything here that we want to touch on next?

Int.: Well, I have sort of a general question. What were the farm situations in the 1920's? What did the extension service do to try to help farmers meet the low prices and the over production.

Taff: You'd better repeat that. I didn't get that all.

Int.: Well, right after the war how did the extension service try to help the farmers meet the new situation?

Taff: Well, maybe you're thinking of the national programs like Triple-A.

Int.: I'm thinking of the '20's mostly.

Taff: Well, we didn't have, you see the American farm bureau was organized at that time after the war. They started in 1919 and they were the promoters of many of these government programs like the Triple-A which came in later there, and all those organizations and we didn't have any particular function in helping those except in an educational way. If a group of people in the county wanted someone to explain the federal programs and the different activities that followed the war we had people who were knowledgeable enough to do that. They had people come out and our staff was very busy in those days, then of course there was a sort of a depression that went on there and that required a great deal of help. Now, I don't believe in this study you have touched yet, on the other activities of our extension which the county asked us often for and that is in help. Two other fields. One is home economics. Now, we had a large home economics staff which was available to the women of these counties and usually they were the wives of the farm bureau members. It's pretty hard to begin with and then, of course, there was a great organization set-up representing the block system within the townships, and maybe you have run across

that spelled in here, too, and they helped set-up this work for women. Then the other field that we became very active in during the war, of course, but after the war too, was boys and girls club work. I was state leader of that from 1919 to 1952 and so don't overlook the functions of the farm bureau. Now, the farm bureau was the center of those two activities. We began to develop quite a staff of women in home economics and some county club leaders in the counties. That was, of course, and aftermath of the war because the war provided that a large amount of federal funds for which we could hire county workers, state workers, and so on.

Int.: You mean in home economics?

Taff: In all these fields. Home economics. Agriculture, of course. We had specialists in the field of agriculture financed largely by federal funds. Now, of course, when the federal government came along with programs why we began to give considerable support to them in an educational way. We didn't promote membership or anything like that. Of course, there was no paid membership in Triple-A. I'm talking about Triple-A that was before the Triple-A came in, I guess. Well, anyway, federal programs did appropriate quite a lot of money which seemed to us to help in a matter of fact to do educational work.

Int.: Those had to be explained to farmers. Were farmers eager to join? Eager to join these federal programs?

Taff: Well, we did because there were certain phases of the federal programs when they came on and during the war and following the war which required a great deal of what we might call farm adjustment. That is they had to

determine whether it would be possible to do certain things like raise more hogs or raise more cattle or what kind of fertilizer to use to increase their crop production and all of those things. Now, those were purposes of the federal program, and we had to do a great deal of educational work with farmers helping them make those adjustments. This was a matter of making adjustments largely. Now let's see.

Int.: About boys and girls club work.

Taff: What's that?

Int.: I was going to ask you about boys and girls club work. How did this help the farm families?

Taff: Farmers as a class were always skeptical of organizations, I think you could say. Now, wait a minute. I want to clarify that some. What I was trying to indicate was that it wasn't easy to organize farmers for anything. They had such varied interests and they were such varied income people, some variations, some very good income and all of that, that that they were very hard to get together, but they came together on educational work more readily on the effects on organization and was promoted a good deal. So, they were not difficult when they found out it would be of their benefit to organize some of these things. Now, you say what was it? Did the effects serve as a farm bureau relationship develop during the 1920's? Well, I don't know. I can't recall now anything that was a great importance in development in some of those criticisms except this at the same time that the American Farm Bureau and the State Farm Bureaus were getting strong. There was a movement on and we were having Grange organizations that we wanted to try to organize. The Farmers Union and various organizations of that kind. State organizations

as well as local organizations, and I suppose, naturally, there had to be some thought given to which organizations ought to be supported by the individual farmer and they were being propagandized, you might say, by all these organizations including the Farm Bureau, of course. So, if any criticism came, it largely came through the activities of some of these other organizations hoping that they would be made stronger and some of them were somewhat.

Int.: In other words they were just serving their own interests in criticism; They were just trying to help themselves by criticising.

Taff: Well, yes.

Int.: What did the extension service finally do about this criticism? Did they react to it at all or did they change their policy?

Taff: From supervisors? Are you talking about our supervisors? What is the first part of your question?

Int.: Yes. Well, did the extension service change its policy because of this criticism or did it just...

Taff: I don't recall any that you could say was a change of policy. We were always emphasizing that our field was the educational field. If we were the county agents when they got into a county were there with a lot of services which they could give people who were trying to organize a county to set-up to get these appropriations of 2,000 dollars and so on. They didn't have any means of having office work done or anything of that kind. The county agents in a lot of cases became kind of the center and looked like much more than they were

promoting than than they really were, but they were giving service to the farmers that would help. The same way as in the matter of the why the organization was the beneficial to a county. They put farmers in a county. The agent took the arguments that a county solicitor for membership might give. They would tell about why the farmers could do this and that if they organized. They could get more help in an educational way. They could get some of this marketing help and so on. That I think was a thing that a sort of mislead in some ways people to think that the county agent was an arm of the farm bureau. Well, in a sense they were, but they were not the promoters of a responsible people to work. They gave the information and helped the farm bureau. They would have given the same help inductive in some cases toward a Grange they wanted organized. We had a Grange here on the campus. I was a member of that Grange way back in the early '20's. Well, it was Grange that wanted to organize and the same is true today. If a Grange wants some help they can get it through a county agent or county extension director, of course.

Int.: So he more or less just helped, that criticism really wasn't justified. It was baseless.

Taff: Well, no, I wouldn't say that it was necessary to change policy here. We were even some of our national people in the U.S. Department of Agriculture felt sometimes that our county agents might have gone a little to far in helping the organization which became the farm bureau get set-up and even help afterwards, but there was no intention on our part to not give help to all organizations in a similar way, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture sometimes-- felt our county agent might be getting into too much of that field promoting organizations. Well, they were promoting the organization

that would help them in their educational work and possibly the only organization in many counties that would do that. You want to finish this at 10:00 I suppose. I'm going to. They'll be coming in here- let's see... The extension service in the 1930's you say here specifically in a new federal program. I was talking awhile ago about AA and Triple-A. Triple-A came in during the Second World War not the First World War. I wanted to correct that. There was no federal law like the Triple-A in the '20's and early '30's. I say there was no organization like the Triple-A which was a federal program passed by Congress and required certain set-ups. Now, that set-up for the Triple-A was entirely separate from the set-up of the extension service. They had their own county committees and all that sort of thing. The Triple-A and some of the other programs.

Int.: Did the extension service work with those local Triple-A committees those . Providing...

Taff: Yes, many of the officers of the county farm bureaus became the Triple-A officers, too. So they had a hired set-up. They had a paid set-up in the counties with a county Triple-A committee man heading it and set-up and office and everything of that kind. That was not a part of the extension service.

Int.: Where did they get those local Triple-A officers? Who were they? The farmers in the county?

Taff: Yes, they selected and I know that in many cases the farm bureaus were consulted on who would be good people to put on that county paid committee.

Int.: Who consulted them? Who decided who was to be put on a local committee?

Taff: Decided what?

Int.: Who decided who was placed on a local Triple-A committee?

Taff: Well, they had a state set-up. It was a state committee and that state committee had a leader. Still does, did have all through the Triple-A program. He was responsible to Washington Federal Department of Agriculture. You see, so that set-up was a paid government set-up clear up to the Department of Agriculture. Now, extension never had such an organization as that. That is they never had a paid leader in Washington at that time. I mean, of course later on the American Farm Bureau had a national set-up, too, but what I mean is--in connection with the Triple-A law and similar legislation Washington always had paid leadership. It was their regular paid leadership there. Now, let's see.