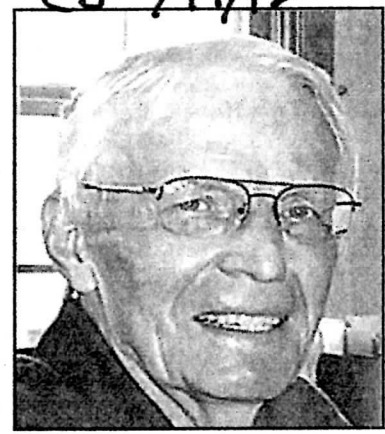


Washburn During The War Years 1939-1945—Agriculture

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Wisconsin farmers, who had suffered through 20 years of agriculture depression, experienced a brief era of prosperity during the war and for a few post-war years. From 1940 to 1950, annual gross farm income rose dramatically, exceeding one billion dollars for the first time. The cost of living was favorable for farmers from 1942 until the wartime agricultural boom ended after 1948. The high levels of war-time production achieved by Wisconsin farmers, which underlay this prosperity, resulted from the favorable confluence of several factors: high demand for dairy products, meat, and vegetables, typically produced by state farmers; favorable weather; mechanization; use of commercial fertilizers; and the ready adaptation of farmers to changing demands. From 1940 to 1945 the number of farms in Bayfield County declined by 273. But the demand for increased food production resulted in an increase of 6,341 acres of cropland, so that by 1945, fewer farms cultivated more acres of cropland than in 1940. This increase was achieved despite a shortage of farm labor caused by the manpower demands of the armed forces and the availability of well-paying jobs in defense industries. The increase in acres of cropland was probably also due in some measure to the continuing land clearance program, which received impetus from the defense effort. Two caterpillar tractors owned by the county were available to farmers for clearing land, enabling them to grow more crops and maintain more livestock. By December 1941 the tractors had cleared a total of 3,315 acres in the county, besides digging ditches and basements, and making roads. The program was somewhat curtailed in 1943 due to the scarcity of labor and lack of parts for the tractors.

As in World War I, food was an essential item in the national war effort, with the two issues of increasing the supply of food and controlling the demand for food.



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There was no federal food agency to manage the supply and distribution of food at the national level. Rather, civilian demand for food was controlled by mandatory food rationing. County agricultural agents and committees, and federal agricultural agencies worked with farmers on the voluntary bases to increase food production. The mobilization of Bayfield County farmers for the "national defense effort" began with a meeting of farm leaders and farm agency representatives at Iron River, on October 14 1941, followed by meetings in every school district in the county on October 24th. There were no appeals to the patriotism of the farmers to increase production for the defense effort. Rather, it was suggested that the defense program "offers farmers an opportunity to benefit through present prices for [their] products and also to help protect themselves from out-of-state competition." Methods for obtaining the maximum production of milk, eggs, and pork, "the products most urgently needed," were recommended. With the nation at war the county farm program for 1942-43 was framed in terms of imperatives, rather than recommendations. Farmers were urged to produce more milk, meat and crops; to use labor efficiently and con-

serve material; and to maintain "good civilian health and high civilian morale." Homemakers were urged "to make the wisest use of foods, to engage in extensive home food preservation, and to keep up health and morale with good meals of healthful, home-produced foods." More food also had to be produced from "home gardens, hencoops and pastures" to reduce the strain on transportation and make available "more food for military and lend-lease needs."

There is little information regarding field days, institutes, short courses, and other farmer meetings suggesting that these customary events were perhaps relatively rare during the war. After the war in Europe ended in early May 1945, reports about these activities appeared more frequently, as farm life returned to peacetime routines. While several reports about Homemakers Club programs appeared before the war, only one Homemakers Club event was reported during the war. There were a few reports before the war about 4-H Club "rally days" and achievement award programs, but only two during the war, describing the mobilization of club members for the war effort, membership reaching 355 members in 23 clubs. After the war, 4-H membership declined, despite efforts to interest rural youths in club activities.

In the fall of 1940 the Bayfield County Electric Cooperative was organized to bring electric power to member farms in Bayfield, Douglas and Ashland Counties. Work on clearing the right-of-way for the transmission line began in June 1941, and by December 100 poles had been erected. Because of the war, the federal government ordered the project halted in March 1942. Work was resumed in July 1945, and by March 1947, 475 miles of line had been completed in the three counties (381 miles in Bayfield County) with 1,000 farms connected to the system.