

University of North Carolina at Asheville

Oliver Max Gardner's Live-At-Home Program: An Analysis Concerning its
Compatibility with Hoover's Agricultural Marketing Act

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By

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“My hope is that when the historian comes to write of my administration -if he ever does- that he will be able to say of me, with all my mistakes, that I at least kept my head and resisted the pressure of quacks and demagogues.”¹ This quote, stated in a telegram from North Carolina Governor Oliver Max Gardner to North Carolina industrialist Ben Gossett, clearly represents Governor Gardner’s desire to be remembered for his resolve and ability to operate under pressure. This particular telegram was sent on December 1, 1931, the day Gardner successfully convinced bankers in New York to loan three million dollars to North Carolina at six percent interest. Gardner secured this loan, badly needed for the North Carolina economy, after it had been declined to seven other states. The unfortunate timing of Gardner’s governorship demanded charm and composure. North Carolina’s joy ride was over. The two administrations prior to Gardner’s operated within a period of unprecedented expansion in spending in North Carolina.² Although State spending during this era proved to have a positive effect on many facets of life in North Carolina, by the time Gardner took office North Carolina’s debt had reached \$178.2 million.³ In 1929, Gardner’s North Carolina faced economic collapse amidst the continually decreasing value of its two predominate cash crops: cotton and tobacco. In his first year as governor, North Carolina’s cotton production had suffered a \$43,000,000 drop from its value in 1927.⁴ This decrease was accelerated by overproduction, which crippled both North

¹ Oliver Max Gardner to Ben Gossett, December 1, 1931. Telegram. From *Public Papers and Letters of Oliver Max Gardner, Governor of North Carolina, 1929-1933* (Raleigh: Council of State, 1937), ed. Edwin Gill, 609. (Hereafter referred to as *Gardner’s Papers and Letters*).

² Allen Jay Maxwell. Foreword to *Public Papers and Letters of Oliver Max Gardner, Governor of North Carolina, 1929-1933*, edited by Edwin Gill. (Raleigh: Council of State, 1937), vii.

³ Joseph L. Morrison. *Governor O. Max Gardner; A Power in North Carolina and New Deal Washington*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971, 53.

⁴ Oliver Max Gardner. Address Delivered at the Exercise in Connection with the Presentation of Prizes and Certificates of Award in the Live-at-Home Contest in the Public Schools, August 23, 1930. From *Gardner’s Papers and Letters*, 198.

Carolina's agriculture and textile industry in the 1920s. Upon his inauguration, it became Gardner's task to inform North Carolinians that the golden age of buying on credit was over. Instead of increasing industrial and agricultural output, it was time to start cutting.

Realizing the extent to which crop overproduction threatened the solvency of North Carolina, Governor Oliver Max Gardner promoted a movement known as the Live-at-Home Program. Gardner pushed this program immediately upon his ascension into office in 1929. It encouraged small farmers to set aside farmland for food and livestock, as opposed to utilizing their land solely for the production of cash crops such as cotton and tobacco. Although voluntary, Gardner's Live-At-Home program produced significant results. It reduced cotton acreage, increased the value of foodstuffs, and saved the lives of thousands of small, independent North Carolina farmers during the first years of the Great Depression. However, it was ultimately unsuccessful at cutting crop overproduction in North Carolina.

To understand the complexity of the agricultural problems facing North Carolina during the Gardner Administration, it is first important to examine the existing scholarship pertaining to the national agricultural problems and the subsequent federal policies initiated throughout the 1920s. As early as the 1950s, a growing consensus developed amongst historians that proposed that the agricultural crisis faced by the United States during the 1920s derived from post-World War I production maladjustments. James Shideler expressed such a notion in his 1956 article, "Herbert Hoover and the Federal Farm Board Project."⁵ In this work, Shideler detailed Hoover's influence on agricultural policy under the Harding and Coolidge administrations. Yet, his research did not thoroughly evaluate the causes of the agricultural crisis, nor did it elaborate on

⁵ James H. Shideler. "Herbert Hoover and the Federal Farm Board Project, 1921-1925." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42, no. 4 (March 1956): 710-719. *J-Stor* (accessed March 29, 2012), 711.

the legislative acts passed to slow its progress during Hoover's tenure as secretary of commerce. Additionally, he failed to provide details concerning the organization and implementation strategies that accompanied Hoover's plan. Although Shideler's article possessed these shortcomings, it is notable as an early study of 1920s agricultural policy, providing a solid foundation from which historians later expanded.

By the late 1960s, more comprehensive scholarship was completed on American farm policy in the early twentieth century. One such work, Murray Benedict's, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development*, expounded upon the agricultural issues of the 1920s in detail, introducing contemporary thought, such as the role domestic factors played in propelling the agricultural crisis.⁶ In this work, Benedict also provided in-depth descriptions of the farm proposals introduced to Congress throughout the early 1920s. Although Benedict spanned nearly two centuries of American agricultural policy and practice, he dedicated a significant portion of this particular work to the 1920s. Perhaps the most telling aspect of his analysis concerns his commentary regarding federal policy's impact on states, in particularly with regards to how the institutions created by federal farm programs were to be organized and implemented. Although detailed and comprehensive, a massive deficiency in this text can be found in Benedict's neglect of the farmer's perspective. Benedict failed to elaborate on the predominant ideologies present in the United States' farming culture during the 1920s. Consequently, he excluded the significance this culture had on the formation of the farming organizations and cooperatives that were established during this time.

⁶ Murray R. Benedict. *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development*. New York: Octagon Books, 1966, 171, 177.

The impact of America's independent farming tradition on the struggle to encourage participation in farming cooperatives during the 1920's can be discerned in *Farm Policy: The Politics of Soil, Surpluses, and Subsidies*.⁷ In this work, published by Congressional Quarterly Inc in 1984, historically significant land acts are used to trace the tradition of farming independence to Thomas Jefferson's notions on land and its role in establishing the American identity. Through the lens of a cultural historian, this source asserted that the perceived privilege of owning farmland, a consequence of Jeffersonian interpretation, played a significant role in creating the American notion of the farm community. This work is valuable in introducing the importance of the American ideals of the farm community. However, it must be noted that this work failed to elaborate on the values of the American farming tradition. Similarly, it failed to draw a clear connection between these values and how they clashed with notions of collective action during the 1920s. The conflict between the ideologies of farmers and the notion of collective action was revisited in 2002 by Deb Hoskins in, "Negotiating the "Circle of Friendship": Agriculture, Cooperation, and Diversity in a Small Town Revitalization Program, 1926-1930."⁸ In this article, Hoskins chronicled the private cooperative initiatives attempted in Longview, Texas during the late 1920s and cited the reasons for their ultimate failure. Hoskins' work also provides valuable insight into the disconnect that existed between the desires of Longview's business class and its farmers.

Collective action and economic theory are closely intertwined in the materialist histories written during the 1990s and 2000s on US Agricultural policy. E.C. Pasour, Jr.'s work,

⁷ Congressional Quarterly, inc. *Farm Policy: The Politics of Soil, Surpluses, and Subsidies*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc, 1984, 103.

⁸ Deb Hoskins. "Negotiating "the Circle of Friendship": Agriculture, Cooperation, and Diversity in a Small-Town Revitalization Program, 1926-1930." *Agricultural History* 76, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 82. *J-Stor* (accessed April 1, 2012).

Agriculture and the State: Market Processes and Bureaucracy, analyzed the effects of government price interference, the formation of cooperatives, and the establishment of marketing orders.⁹ This work incorporated historical facts and information with economic concepts to paint a vivid picture of the consequences of cooperatives, which Pasour concluded was often overproduction for producers. While Pasour's work focused on agricultural policies in relation to governmental agencies, Elizabeth Hoffman and Gary D. Libecap are noted for analyzing historical agricultural policy that lacked the luxury of government support.¹⁰ In their article, "Institutional Choice and the Development of U.S. Agricultural Policies in the 1920s", Hoffman and Libecap concluded that successful management of five factors: number of heterogeneity farmers, homogeneity of product, number of existing farm cooperatives, level of accessible information on output and shipment, ease of cooperative entry, and needed output production, were crucial to the success a private agricultural cooperative effort. Although federal intervention was needed for forced agricultural reduction by the early 1930's, Hoffman and Libecap's analysis afforded the possibility of private cooperative success. In 2010, the notion of applying economic theory to agricultural cooperatives in the 1920s was revisited by Daniel Sumner, Julian Alston, and Joseph Glauber in their article, "Evolution of the Economics of Agricultural Policy."¹¹ In this work, Sumner, Alston, and Glauber concluded that the farm problem plaguing the United States during the 1920s was centered on economic growth. In other

⁹ C. E. Pasour. *Agriculture and the State: Market Processes and Bureaucracy*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990, 134.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Hoffman and Gary D. Libecap. "Institutional Choice and the Development of U.S. Agricultural Policies in the 1920s." *Journal Of Economic History* 51, no. 2 (June 1991): 397-411. *J-Stor* (accessed March 31, 2012).

¹¹ Daniel A. Sumner and Julian M. Alston, and Joseph W. Glauber. "Evolution of the Economics of Agricultural Policy." *American Journal Of Agricultural Economics* 92, no. 2 (April 2010): 403-423. *EBSCO-Host* (accessed April 1, 2012), 406.

words, they concluded that too many laborers in the farming sector during the 1920s translated to a decrease in per capita farm income, as a shift in labor did not occur from farming to other sectors of the economy. Although much of this article details agricultural policy after the 1920s, their conclusion on the root of the problem is unique and valuable.

Although historians have analyzed national agricultural policy during the 1920s in great detail, little has been written regarding the agricultural initiatives of North Carolina during this time period. However, recent scholarship on the sufferings of North Carolina's textile industry during the 1920s provides insight into the role agriculture played in North Carolina's industrial economy. Phillip Wood's, *Southern Capitalism: The Political Economy of North Carolina, 1880-1980*, details the origins of North Carolina's textile industry, providing agricultural statistics that clearly demonstrate the factors that prompted the industry's success in the state.¹² Wood's work also notes the pressures placed on North Carolina's business and political leaders by the agricultural crisis of the 1920s, conveying the inter-connectedness between agriculture and industry in North Carolina. Although Wood does not reference specific agricultural policy directly in his work, his commentary on the political significance of the relationship between North Carolina's agriculture and industry is valuable. The extent of this relationship was more recently analyzed in Rob Christensen's work, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina*, in particularly with regards to the political pressures faced by Governor Oliver Max Gardner as a result of the poor

¹² Phillip J. Wood. *Southern Capitalism: The Political Economy of North Carolina, 1880-1980*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986, 49.

economical conditions of the state.¹³ Although Christensen failed to mention Gardner's Live-At-Home program, his documentation of the tense industrial climate during Gardner's administration is valuable in further communicating the reciprocal relationship of agriculture and industry.

Scholarship concerning Oliver Max Gardner and his Live-At-Home program is rare. In fact, only one source exists, *Governor O. Max Gardner: A Power in North Carolina and New Deal Washington*, which details the program's goals and evaluates its impact on the state.¹⁴ This particular work is a biography of Gardner written by Joseph Morrison in 1971. Morrison's detailed account of Gardner's life is extremely valuable, as it is Gardner's only biography and serves as the only source that exclusively focuses on his life and political career. Morrison's work is unique in that it managed to give Gardner's perspective on the agricultural problems in North Carolina during the 1920s and showed how this perspective influenced his policy. Morrison concluded that Gardner's Live-At-Home program was successful in several regards, claiming that it helped to save the lives of many poor farmers throughout the state. However, Morrison also claimed that the Live-At-Home program was not a remedy for the state's agricultural crisis, as it was only capable to convince the poorest of farmers to cooperate.

There is currently no existing scholarship that focuses exclusively on Governor Oliver Max Gardner's Live-At-Home program in relation to President Herbert Hoover's Agricultural Marketing Act. In fact, there is no existing scholarship that evaluates the impact of Hoover's AMA on any state-initiated programs. Historians have outlined the goals of both Hoover and

¹³ Rob Christensen. *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008, 62.

¹⁴Morrison, 78.

Gardner's programs, analyzed their approaches, and evaluated their respective influences. However, to date, historians have focused their efforts on assessing Hoover's federal policy independently of state policy. It is in evaluating and questioning the compatibility of these once co-existing programs where this scholarship makes a unique contribution to the historical field.

In evaluating Gardner's Live-At-Home program, a noticeable failure rested in its inability to encourage large-scale cooperation from North Carolinian farmers. However, most crippling to Gardner's program was the fact that it was undermined by federal policy, namely the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929 enacted under the Hoover administration. Although both programs shared similar goals and operated on the consent of farmers, the Agricultural Marketing Act worked against Gardner's Live-At-Home program, as many North Carolina farmers were content to sell their excess crops to the government rather than voluntarily reduce output without the subsidy of a governmental agency.

From his first moments in office, Governor Gardner understood that North Carolina's production of cotton and tobacco must decrease in order to stabilize their markets. However, crop overproduction was a national problem that had been brewing nationwide since the end of World War I. Although American industry blossomed throughout the 1920s, economic prosperity did not reach every sector of the economy, especially regarding the agricultural sector. American agriculture exports were in sharp decline after World War I, as American farmers now had to compete with a resurging European market.¹⁵ Consequently, the roots of agricultural overproduction can be traced to the policies of Woodrow Wilson's administration.

¹⁵ Frederick Lewis Allen. *Only Yesterday and Since Yesterday: A Popular History of the 20's and 30's*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1986, 161.

On July 17, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Farm Loan Act.¹⁶ This act established federal land banks in each of the twelve Federal Reserve districts throughout the country. These banks were designed to afford farmers long-term credit opportunities at a low interest rate in the hopes that it would lead to farm expansion and mechanization. Expansion and mechanization empowered small farmers and enabled them to compete with larger agricultural producers. Furthermore, the increased output was necessary to meet the demand of the allied European countries during the war. However, at the war's conclusion, the agricultural markets of many European countries were the first sectors of the economy to return. Increased output spawned by legislation such as the Farm Loan Act quickly gave way to overproduction. For example, the index number for all farm prices, which stood at 205 in 1920, collapsed to 116 in 1921.¹⁷ The general recession of 1920-1921 made matters worse for farmers. The drop in the price index provided foresight into the agricultural troubles that loomed for the United States in the years ahead.

Low agricultural prices between 1920 and 1921 gave rise to a pro-tariff sentiment that exploded across the West and South.¹⁸ American farmers were concerned that foreign competition was causing the sharp decline in farm prices. Increasing frustrations led to the passage of the Fordney Emergency Tariff, which sought to increase American tariffs. Although President Wilson vetoed the act, President Warren Harding signed it shortly after his inauguration.¹⁹ Throughout 1921 and 1922, President Harding signed a series of other

¹⁶ Allen, 161.

¹⁷ Allen, 161. A price index indicates the relative changes in the price of a particular good or service over time.

¹⁸ Robert K. Murray. *The Harding Era; Warren G. Harding and His Administration*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969, 206.

¹⁹ Murray, 207.

agricultural legislation aimed at alleviating the pressures facing American farmers after the reemergence of the European market.

To intensify matters, Harding's administration was hounded by the formation of a farm bloc, led by Republicans William S. Kenyon and Lester J. Dickinson, who promoted agricultural interests in Congress.²⁰ This bloc was not satisfied with the emergency tariff and wanted direct, immediate government intervention. In 1921, Harding called for the creation of the Joint Commission on Agricultural Inquiry, which presented its findings at a conference that met in Washington in January of 1922.²¹ The commission found that the farm depression resulted from many different domestic and international economic factors. However, although the commission made recommendations, no policy came of the conference. Wary of inaction, by the fall of 1922 Harding's administration had enacted an emergency tariff, passed legislation to establish and protect farm cooperatives, extended farm credits, and passed legislation regulating agricultural markets.²²

The policies of Harding's administration did little to improve the state of agriculture in the United States. As a result, on February 4, 1924, Harding's successor, Calvin Coolidge, organized another agricultural conference. During this conference, Coolidge became convinced that agriculture's biggest problem rested in its ineffective marketing. Like the preceding administrations, Herbert Hoover, Coolidge's Secretary of Commerce, advocated for an increased emphasis on farming cooperatives. Hoover was eventually successful in convincing Coolidge of his ideology, and when the "farmer-friendly" William Marion Jardine became the Secretary of

²⁰ Eugene P. Trani and David L. Wilson. *The Presidency of Warren G. Harding*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977, 66.

²¹ Trani, 212.

²² Murray, 207.

Agriculture in 1925, Coolidge proposed the Jardine-Tincher plan. This plan argued that cooperatives could successfully stabilize farm prices by purchasing and holding excess production if they were given the loans to do so.²³ Although they were willing to empower cooperatives, neither Coolidge nor Hoover saw it to be the government's role to interfere with the prices of farm goods through tariffs.

Coolidge's cooperatives did little to help many of the country's struggling farm families. As a result, Coolidge's agricultural policies fell in popularity to what became known as McNary-Haugenism, or legislation aimed at selling farm surpluses, typically to overseas markets. McNary-Haugenism was the brainchild of George Peek, an official of the Moline Plow Company and president of the American Council of Agriculture. Peek argued that uncontrolled agricultural output drove down U.S. farm prices to the world price. Instead of cooperatives, he proposed government-enforced restrictions on output and the use of fluctuating tariffs, which would protect domestic farmers, as they would "receive the tariff to gain a differential over the world price."²⁴ Peek's plan was modeled off the industrial practices of the day, such as those exemplified by the Standard Oil Company. Although Coolidge vetoed a series of McNary-Haugen bills, his struggle against them defined his presidency. Growing tensions between farmers and federal government agencies, spawned by consecutive administrations of ineffective policy, escalated to new heights by 1929.

The average farmer in North Carolina during the 1920s had reason for apprehension. In 1909, 665,132 bales of cotton were produced in North Carolina. By 1919, the number of bales jumped to 858,406, an effect of Wilson's Farm Loan Act, which allowed farmers to invest in

²³ Trani, 87.

²⁴ Trani, 89.

machinery.²⁵ In 1909, the total worth of all farm machinery and implements in the state was \$18,441,619. However, in 1919, the total worth of all farm machinery and implements in North Carolina totaled \$54,621,363.²⁶ Increased mechanization and production in North Carolina reflected in the total acreage of cotton as well. In 1909, the total cotton acreage stood at 1,274,404. In 1929, that number swelled to 1,640,398. Throughout the 1920s, North Carolina's cotton output actually decreased, evidencing federal efforts to slow overproduction. In 1929, the number of cotton bales produced dropped to 640,799, a 25,000-bale difference from the number of bales produced in 1909. However, decreased cotton production in tandem with its continuously decreasing value made it even more difficult for farmers to pay their bills. In 1929, the value of cotton was \$40,088,385. This was \$1,977,714 less than in 1909.²⁷

Cotton and tobacco had very similar production and revenue trends throughout the 1920s. Therefore, Governor Gardner acknowledged that it was disastrous for these two crops to dominate all of North Carolina's farmland. The soil, climate, and infrastructure were already in place for North Carolina to begin growing food. With this in mind, Governor Gardner sought to create a program to cut cash crop production and encourage crop diversification. The need for such a program was dire, as by the time he assumed gubernatorial office in 1929, the price of cotton was well below the costs it took to produce it. Once settled in Raleigh, Governor Gardner quickly began to organize a response. He recognized that the excess acreage now available,

²⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS): Census of Agriculture. 1935: North Carolina, <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/AgCensusImages/1935/01/26/1513/Table-01.pdf>

²⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS): Census of Agriculture. 1925: North Carolina, <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/AgCensusImages/1925/01/26/1555/Table-01.pdf>

²⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS): Census of Agriculture. 1935: North Carolina.

combined with slumping production, meant North Carolina had the acreage necessary to diversify their crops. According to Gardner, crop diversification would help to combat overproduction. Growing food would also help North Carolina's poor rural families survive.²⁸ Furthermore, Gardner found that increased crop diversification would help the state's ballooning budget, as North Carolina would have spend less money on importing food.

Gardner's involvement with agriculture throughout his upbringing left him with a respect for farming and played a crucial role in shaping the ideologies that would ultimately affect his policies as governor. He was born in 1882 in Shelby, North Carolina. His father, Dr. O.P. Gardner was a Civil War veteran and a physician in Cleveland County.²⁹ After the Civil War, Dr. Gardner, once a prominent landowner in Cleveland County, was stripped of his prewar properties. As a result, the Gardner family did not have a substantial amount of money, living on Dr. O.P. Gardner's earnings as a country doctor and a small-scale farmer. When Gardner was around eleven, he began helping his father farm their small parcel of land, growing corn and wheat. However, even as a young boy Gardner acknowledged that the hard physical labor and poor pay were not for him.³⁰ In 1900, with the help of a single county scholarship he received upon graduating from Shelby High School, he enrolled at the North Carolina College of Architecture and Mechanic Arts, where he earned a degree in chemistry.

Gardner's formal political career began in 1908 when he became an organizer for the Young Men's Democratic Clubs of North Carolina.³¹ In 1910, he was elected to the state senate and was re-elected to a second term in 1914, serving president pro tem in 1915. In 1916, under

²⁸ Morrison, 75.

²⁹ Morrison, 53.

³⁰ Morrison, 8.

³¹ Maxwell, xiv.

Thomas Bickett's governorship, he was elected to the position of lieutenant governor. Gardner's meteoric rise in North Carolina culminated in 1928 when he easily beat Republican Herbert Seawell in the gubernatorial race.

In his inaugural address, Governor Gardner stated, "I take the oath of office of governor humbly in this distinguished presence, deeply conscious of its responsibilities, and seriously impressed with its true significance."³² The honeymoon period following his victory did not last long, overshadowed by the increasingly gloomy economic outlook of the state in 1929. North Carolina was a state comprised largely of poor, small-scale farmers. To further complicate matters, the most prominent industry in North Carolina, the textile industry, was feeling the effects of cotton overproduction, decreasing profits on finished goods. In 1929, with the state facing full economic collapse, Governor Gardner made cutting agricultural production one of his top priorities.

Gardner's dedication to North Carolina agriculture was clear from very early on in his administration. In April of 1929, Gardner delivered a speech in Farmville, North Carolina in which he stated, "I have chosen to dedicate my administration to the upbuilding of agriculture in North Carolina.... I shall give four years of my life to the unending struggle, that will not terminate with my administration, but must go on until we finally reach Canaan's fair and happy land."³³ Gardner centered this particular speech on North Carolina's poor food production. He noted that of the \$69,000 worth of groceries sold at three stores in Eastern North Carolina in 1928, \$67,188 came from goods that were produced out of the state. Overall, he estimated that

³² Oliver Max Gardner. Inaugural Address, January 11, 1929. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 3.

³³ Oliver Max Gardner. One Story Farming, April 9, 1929. Speech delivered at Farmville, North Carolina before the Eastern Carolina Chamber of Commerce. From The Southern Historical Collection at the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, *Oliver Max Gardner Papers, 1892-1966 (Series 2, Folder 713)*, 6.

North Carolina imported approximately \$ 250,000,000 worth of food and food supplies annually.³⁴ For the sake of morale, Gardner allowed himself to boast:

For good or bad, Eastern North Carolina is the world's best example of a non-food, cash-crop type of agriculture. No other area grows both cotton and tobacco on the Eastern North Carolina scale. In percentage of total agricultural wealth produced annually by non-feed cash crops, no other region in America, or in the world so far as I know, begins to compare with this region.³⁵

However, he was apprehensive about traditional farming practices in North Carolina. His reference of North Carolina's agricultural statistics conveyed his concerns about the state's dependency on cotton and tobacco, especially in the East. It became clear, through speeches such as the one given at Farmville, that Gardner was hoping to diminish such reliance through farmer cooperation with his new agriculture initiative, known as the Live-At-Home program.

Governor Gardner's emphasis on crop diversification persisted throughout 1929. In a speech entitled "The Republican Party and the Farmer," Gardner recalled that in September of 1927, cotton was selling for nearly 22 cents a pound. Gardner reminded farmers that they were advised by the estimations of the Farm Board not to sell their cotton in September. Rather, they were told to hold their crops until prices rose to 25 cents, which they were forecasted to reach by the end of the year. Later in the speech, Gardner provoked the sentiments of farmers by asking them to "remember that for a lot of this same cotton you got less than 18 cents a pound."³⁶ The 1927 statistics cited in this speech served to remind farmers that agricultural prices were continually decreasing. In this address, Gardner sought to convince farmers that crop

³⁴ One Story Farming, 5.

³⁵ One Story Farming, 4.

³⁶ Oliver Max Gardner. The Republican Party and the Farmer, [? 1929]. From *Oliver Max Gardner Papers Collection* (Series 2, Folder 110).

diversification was necessary to combat overproduction and raise prices. However, Gardner's tone in this particular message also served to attack the poor price estimates given by the newly established Federal Farm Board, upon which farmers needed to rely upon under the structure created by Hoover's Agricultural Marketing Act.

The Agricultural Marketing Act, signed June 15, 1929, was designed to stabilize the agricultural market through the prevention and management of agricultural surpluses.³⁷ The Federal Farm Board was established to oversee the policies of the act. On July 15, one month after the AMA's signing, Hoover met with members of his Federal Farm Board for the first time. In his address, delivered during the meeting, Hoover noted that the Board was designed to "adjust production to need [and] to create permanent business institutions for marketing." Like Coolidge's Jardine-Tincher plan, Hoover's Farm Board was primarily responsible for organizing farmer cooperatives and purchasing surplus crops.³⁸ Hoover sought price stabilization through farming cooperatives, as he saw that cooperatives placed farmers in greater control. Moreover, Hoover vehemently opposed government price fixing. He had acted as the head of the United States Food Administration in 1917 under the Wilson administration, controlling its price-fixing and rationing operations during World War I.³⁹ He acknowledged that most prices had been fixed too high during World War I, leading to the problem of agricultural overproduction that plagued the United States in the 1920s. Through the efforts of the Farm Board, Hoover aimed to

³⁷ Herbert Hoover. Remarks at the First Meeting of the Federal Farm Board, Responsibilities and Problems Before the Board, July 15, 1929. Address. From *The State Papers and Other Public Writing of Herbert Hoover, March 4, 1929 to October 1, 1931*. Ed. William Starrs Myer (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1970), 75. (Hereafter referred to as *Hoover's Papers*).

³⁸ Edgar Eugene Robinson and Vaughn Davis Bornet. *Herbert Hoover, President of the United States*. Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1975, 72.

³⁹ Murray, 191.

“establish to the farmer an equal opportunity in [America’s] economic system with other industry.”⁴⁰

The Federal Farm Board consisted of eight members, responsible for administering the funds to the farmer cooperatives. The Board’s funds totaled \$500,000,000 and were appropriated by the Senate upon the signing of the Agricultural Marketing Act.⁴¹ Through the loaning of these funds to the cooperatives, the Farm Board relinquished control to the cooperatives, relying upon them to accomplish the Agricultural Marketing Act’s main objectives. Hoover had expressed his faith in cooperatives throughout his political career, advocating on their behalf during his tenure as secretary of commerce. Yet, just prior to the signing of the Agricultural Marketing Act, Hoover again sought to convince his competition in Congress that cooperatives were a feasible form of farm relief and an appropriate form of government ‘intervention.’ On April 16, 1929, Hoover delivered a message to the first session of the Seventy-first Congress in which he expressed his plan for farm relief. In this message, Hoover claimed that farming cooperatives were “the most progressive movement in all agriculture.”⁴² He continued by noting the expansion of cooperatives during the 1920s, citing their nearly 2 million members as evidence of their growing popularity. Furthermore, Hoover claimed that cooperatives already successfully distributed over \$2,500,000,000 worth of farm products annually. According to Hoover, “all proposals for government assistance should originate with

⁴⁰ Remarks at the First Meeting of the Federal Farm Board, Responsibilities and Problems Before the Board, 75.

⁴¹ Robinson, 77.

⁴² Herbert Hoover. Message to the First Session of the Seventy-first Congress, Special Session for Farm Relief and Limited Changes in the Tariff, April 16, 1929. Message. From *Hoover’s Papers*, 33.

such organizations and be the result of their application.” In Hoover’s cooperative structure, “government [would] be removed from engaging in the business of agriculture.”⁴³

Yet, for Hoover to successfully obtain support for his farming cooperatives, he first needed to change the negative attitude with which the average American farmer received the notion of cooperatives. As a result, the initial task of the Farm Board was to convince farmers of the benefits they could reap in joining a cooperative. James C. Stone of Kentucky, Vice Chairman of the Farm Board and a tobacco representative, advocated on behalf of the Farm Board during an interview conducted by newspaper journalist Raymond Heale. In the newspaper report on this interview, Heale recalled, “It may be too much to expect, [Stone] said, that all farmers will participate in the cooperative movement. [Stone] believes that enough of them will come to appreciate its great benefits, however, and be eager to share in the larger profits it seems to him to bring.”⁴⁴ In this interview, Stone clearly alluded to the Farm Board’s approach of enticing farmers with the funds they would receive upon joining.

Hoover continued to gain support in Congress by arguing that the ideologies behind the McNary-Huagen bills were harmful to United States’ agriculture. He felt that fixing prices and selling surpluses overseas would actually inflate food prices, encourage agricultural overproduction, benefit large agricultural producers, and prompt other struggling industries to request government aid as well.⁴⁵ Hoover’s fear of McNary-Haugen legislation was deeply rooted in his belief that American farm profits could not depend on foreign marketing schemes.

⁴³ Message to the First Session of the Seventy-first Congress, Special Session for Farm Relief and Limited Changes in the Tariff, 34.

⁴⁴ Raymond Heale. *Says Farm Board Can Aid Growers*, [?, 1929]. Unidentified Newspaper Clipping. *Oliver Max Gardner Papers Collection (Series 2, Folder 713)*.

⁴⁵ Herbert Hoover to Senator Charles L. McNary, April 20, 1929. Letter. From *Hoover Papers*, 39.

Hoover clearly outlined his rejection of McNary-Haugen ideology in a letter to Senator McNary in April of 1929. In this letter, Hoover gives McNary ten reasons for why he does not agree with his export debenture plan, many of which are centered on his fear that foreign countries would capitalize on the export debentures.⁴⁶

Although the farm board had some funds at their disposal, they held no real authority, relying on the voluntary commitment of farmers through the established cooperatives. In this regard, the role of the Farm Board was a direct reflection of Hoover's economic philosophies, as he wanted no direct federal interference with domestic prices.⁴⁷ The abilities of the virtually powerless Farm Board were tested with the stock market crash in October of 1929, as the "farm problem" changed completely as domestic consumption plummeted to new lows. The plunge suffered in the general economy during this time further tried the effectiveness of the Farm Board, as it soon became apparent that stabilization organizations lacked the funds to absorb all the surplus crops. The amount of surplus crops significantly outweighed the funds at the stabilization organizations disposal. This marked the ultimate failure of Hoover's Federal Farm Board.

Meanwhile, the stock market crash of 1929 further invigorated Gardner's efforts to promote his Live-At-Home program. On October 25, 1929, one day after "Black Thursday", Gardner gave a speech to agricultural, business, financial, and community leaders in Winston Salem, North Carolina. In this speech, Gardner identified four main problems with North Carolina's agriculture: overproduction, the lack of cooperative agriculture, the absence of

⁴⁶ Herbert Hoover to Senator Charles L. McNary, 42. Debenture in this sense refers to a debt without collateral.

⁴⁷ Joan H. Wilson. *Herbert Hoover, Forgotten Progressive*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1975, 105.

organizations ensuring that the profits from farming reached down to the farmers, and the need to raise farmer's standard of living.⁴⁸ Gardner held that these problems could be addressed through subscription and support of his Live-At-Home program.

Gardner did not invent the Live-at-Home program. In fact, a similar program had been promoted during Cam Morrison's tenure as Governor of North Carolina from 1921 to 1925.⁴⁹ However, once adopted, Gardner propelled the "movement" to new heights. In December of 1930, he officially announced his Live-At-Home program. Gardner began this process late in 1929, dedicating December 15-21 of 1929 as "Live-At-Home Week."⁵⁰ In his formal proclamation, he argued that, "No state in the American Union is better equipped by nature to "live-at-home" and no state is more dependent upon outside sources for almost every food necessity."⁵¹ He went on to note that the money North Carolina spends on food and feedstuffs could be allocated instead to improving schools and other public facilities. Gardner intentionally boasted of North Carolina's agricultural potential in this proclamation. His program had no subsidy or purchasing agency like Hoover's Agricultural Marketing Act. Rather, its only chance of succeeding rested in Gardner's ability to convince North Carolina farmers to buy into his ideology. In other words, farmers across the state would have to voluntarily set aside land for growing food instead of cotton and tobacco. In order for Gardner to have a chance for success, he realized that he would need some very convincing propaganda.

⁴⁸ Oliver Max Gardner. Address of Governor O. Max Gardner to a Gathering of Agricultural, Business, Financial, and Community Leaders from 12 Counties of North Carolina at the Invitation of the Winston Salem Kiwanis Club, October 25, 1929. Address. From *Oliver Max Gardner Papers Collection (Series 2, Folder 718)*.

⁴⁹ Morrison, 75.

⁵⁰ Oliver Max Gardner. Live-At-Home Week, ? 1929. Proclamation. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 84.

⁵¹ Live-At-Home Week, 83.

During his Live-At-Home week, Gardner held a Live-At-Home banquet at the governor's mansion. He invited nearly 250 newspaper editors as well the Council of State to his dinner, held on December 19, 1929. He supplied them with a menu comprised entirely of North Carolina products. Oysters, shrimp, turnip salad, sauerkraut, cheeses, buttermilk, sweet milk, ice cream, fruits, nuts, and cigarettes are merely a few of the dinner items that Gardner offered his guests.⁵² The dinner was a tremendous success, receiving spectacular reviews in newspapers throughout the state. With such events, Gardner took center-stage in his program, dramatizing it and lending it his galvanizing personality. However, Gardner did not stop at the governor's mansion dinner. He realized that an effective way to bring his program to the forefront of the media spotlight was to involve North Carolina's public school children.

After conferring with A.T. Allen, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Gardner sponsored an obligatory Live-At-Home curriculum to be implemented in North Carolina schools. This curriculum was designed to teach students the value of cultivating and preserving food as well as raising livestock. After completing the curriculum, students were invited to participate in an essay-writing contest. The winners of the contest, two high school students, were invited to the grounds of the Capitol and presented with trophies. As Gardner had predicted, the ceremony made media headlines across North Carolina. In fact, he was quite pleased with the results. In the award ceremony Gardner exclaimed, "For you, boys and girls, to reach this hall in this contest is a splendid compliment to your ability to analyze, understand, and to state adequately

⁵² Live-At-Home Dinner, December 19, 1929. Menu. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 697.

and convincingly the agricultural needs of North Carolina.”⁵³ Generally speaking, the propaganda efforts paid off for Gardner, and by early 1930 enthusiasm was high for his Live-At-Home program, especially in rural areas of the state.

However, by mid-1930, Gardner had yet to receive the level of cooperation from farmers that was necessary if his program was going to make a significant impact on the state’s problem of overproduction. On April 28, 1930, Gardner delivered an address at the opening of the Southern Economic Conference in Asheville, North Carolina. In this address, Gardner emphasized farmer cooperation throughout the southern states, noting that the level of agricultural production in one state impacted the economic livelihood of farmers in another. Gardner urged farmers to adopt a regional approach as opposed to looking at the problem on the state-level. He understood the close connection between the agricultural economies of the southern states. He also realized the economic implications struggling farmers had on other sectors of the economy. In this address, Gardner noted that reduced purchasing power of a group as large as southern farmers impacted every other sector of the economy, crossing state lines.⁵⁴ Gardner was convinced that voluntarily cutting production was a viable possibility. Yet, this possibility only existed if he could successfully achieve cooperation.

Gardner’s efforts to encourage cooperation amongst states were ultimately trumped by his desire for cooperative efforts at home. On September 30, 1930, Gardner delivered an address to a contingent of tobacco farmers and representatives at North Carolina State College. The

⁵³ Oliver Max Gardner. The Declaration of North Carolina Agricultural Independence, June 30, 1930. Address Delivered at the Exercises in Connection with the Presentation of Prizes and Certificates of Award in the Live-At-Home Contest in the Public Schools. From *Gardner’s Papers and Letters*, 198.

⁵⁴ Oliver Max Gardner. Cooperation Essential in Solving Economic Problems, April 28, 1930. Address Delivered at the Opening of the Southern Economic Conference at Asheville, North Carolina. From *Gardner’s Papers and Letters*, 170.

focus of the address was the need for crop reduction. Early in the address, Gardner noted that the estimated cotton crop for 1930 was \$24,000,000 lower than its yield in 1929, while the estimated haul for tobacco was \$15,000,000 below its 1929 revenue. “At these prices”, Gardner stated, “cotton and tobacco are selling well below their production value.”⁵⁵ Later in his address Gardner suggested, “under producing as the best antidote for the evils of overproducing.”⁵⁶ He encouraged farmers to act immediately, promising to call the governors of each state that attended the Southern Economic Conference in Asheville the previous spring to “make plans for a campaign of acreage reduction.” During his address, he also commented on the progress of his Live-At-Home program and acknowledged that most Eastern North Carolina farmers disregarded his program at the beginning of 1930. Therefore, he took the opportunity to share with them its successes. Gardner boasted that the Live-At-Home program had been a marvelous success in its first year. He noted that the federal government confirmed that the program added at least \$16,000,000 to the food and feedstuffs produced.⁵⁷ Such results thrilled Gardner, who realized that the value added to the food produced by the Live-At-Home program was the same value that North Carolina would have spent on imports. Gardner contended that the acreage and labor put into this land would have otherwise gone into cotton and tobacco. The tone of Gardner’s message suggested that it is about time for more farmers to join his program.

Gardner pushed his agenda harder in 1931, focusing his efforts to Eastern North Carolina where the resistance had been the fiercest in 1929 and 1930. In another attempt to get Eastern North Carolinians on board with his program, Gardner delivered a radio address in March that

⁵⁵ Oliver Max Gardner. Crop Reduction Necessary For Increased Prices, September 11, 1930. Address Before The Mass Meeting of Tobacco Growers, Warehousemen, and Dealers at North Carolina State College. From *Gardner’s Papers and Letters*, 220.

⁵⁶ Crop Reduction Necessary For Increased Prices, 226.

⁵⁷ Crop Reduction Necessary For Increased Prices, 225.

specifically targeted tobacco reduction. According to Gardner, the 1929 tobacco crop was 750 million pounds and sold for an average of 17.82 cents a pound.⁵⁸ In 1930, the production of bright-leaf rose to 852 million pounds, yet sold for only \$11.86 a pound. Farmers knew as well as Gardner that Eastern North Carolina could not stand another year of devastatingly low-priced tobacco and cotton.⁵⁹ Gardner's tone turned desperate at the end of this address when he begged, "Let us plant soil-improving crops for indirect profits in future years, instead of planting money crops to bring direct losses this year."⁶⁰

Although progress was slow, Gardner's program continued to gain momentum throughout his tenure as governor. By July 18, 1931, Gardner released statistics received from the Bureau of Crop Estimates of the Federal Government that evidenced the success of the Live-At-Home program from 1930 to 1931. According to these statistics, wheat cultivation increased by 69,000 acres, corn acreage increased 101,000 acres, oats acreage increased 17,000, and soybeans acreage increased 66,000 acres among many other increasing crop yields that were previously neglected for cotton and tobacco.⁶¹

Toward the end of his term, Gardner's disdain for the Federal Farm Board and Hoover's Agricultural Marketing Act became much more apparent and public. In an official statement released on August 8, 1931, Gardner indicted the Farm Board for "blundering" in their speculative control of cotton in the South.⁶² In this statement, Gardner noted that the Farm

⁵⁸ Oliver Max Gardner. Crop Reduction in North Carolina, March 26, 1931. Address on Tobacco Acreage Reduction Delivered Over Radio Station WPTF Raleigh, NC. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 291.

⁵⁹ Crop Reduction in North Carolina, 290.

⁶⁰ Crop Reduction in North Carolina, 295.

⁶¹ Oliver Max Gardner. Progress of Live-At-Home Program, July 18, 1931. Statement. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 524.

⁶² Oliver Max Gardner. Withholding Cotton Will Advance the Price, August 8, 1931. Statement. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 526.

Board's selling of cotton at five to six cents per pound throughout 1931 had served as a "damper" on the [cotton] market and tended to prevent cotton from participating in potential advances.⁶³ Instead of holding their surplus crops, Gardner recognized that the cash-strapped Farm Board was "dumping" 10,000 to 20,000 bales a day on the already severely depressed market. Nevertheless, the buyouts offered by the Farm Board remained appealing to many farmers.

Late in 1931, with the end of his term rapidly approaching, the future of the Live-At-Home program came into question. Gardner, still believing in the necessity of the program, delivered a rousing address at Faison, North Carolina on November 6, 1931. However, instead of delivering a plea for cooperatives or crop reduction, Gardner delighted in sharing the successes of his Live-At-Home program, which was nearing the end of its second year. Of these successes, Gardner mentioned a 10,000,000-bushel increase in the production of corn from 1929-1931, a 2,000,000-bushel increase in wheat production, 57,000,000-pound increase in peanut farming, and a 2,000,000-bushel increase in sweet potatoes.⁶⁴ Gardner also noted in this address that the Live-At-Home program served as a tax reduction measure, saving approximately \$36,000,000 in 1930 and 1931 combined in monies that would have previously been spent on food imports. Instead, this money now went to fund various projects all across the state. From these statistics, it appeared to Gardner as if his program was beginning to catch on. However,

⁶³ Withholding Cotton Will Advance The Price, 525.

⁶⁴ Oliver Max Gardner. The Live-At-Home Movement Is Paying Dividends, November 6, 1931. Address Delivered At The Live-At-Home Celebration, Faison North Carolina. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 359.

Gardner himself cited the Live-At-Home program as only “the first step in permanent agricultural relief.”⁶⁵

In reality, by mid-1932, both Gardner’s Live-At-Home program and Herbert Hoover’s Agricultural Marketing Act were nearing their last days as the administrations of both men came to a close. Their coinciding policies shared the same goal: to restore agricultural price stability by cutting over-production. Furthermore, both programs were voluntary, requiring the cooperation of farmers. However, the Live-At-Home program and the Agricultural Marketing Act sought to accomplish their goal in very different manners. The Farm Board, established by the Agricultural Market Act, bought surpluses from farmers and stored them until domestic prices rose. Gardner’s Live-At-Home program simply explained to farmers that cutting acreage was necessary, and offered advice on how this could be accomplished in the most effective manner.⁶⁶ It did not provide farmers with a form of payment for their cooperation. As a result, many farmers were content to keep production levels up, in part for fear of falling behind in the stiff competition with farmers throughout the region, but also because they accepted the notion that they could simply sell their surpluses to the government. Certainly profits suffered, as the Farm Board’s support price on cotton and tobacco always fell well below the market price. However, legislation such as Hoover’s, gave farmers a way to avoid making a radical, and likely uncomfortable change in lifestyle.

Gardner’s program lacked the size and sophistication needed to solve the agricultural problems plaguing North Carolina during the 1920s and early 1930s. However, it did produce remarkable results considering the level of participation it received from North Carolina’s

⁶⁵ The Live-At-Home Movement Is Paying Dividends, 361.

⁶⁶ Morrison, 75.

farmers. By the end of his term, Gardner's Live-At-Home program was noted to have reduced cotton acreage by 536,000 acres.⁶⁷ The program also raised the value of foodstuffs by more than \$50,000,000 during his tenure as governor. Yet, the financial incentive of Hoover's Agricultural Marketing Act proved to be too steep an obstacle for Gardner's program to overcome. This was especially true in Eastern North Carolina, where tobacco was king and participation in his program was the lowest. As a result, the potential benefits of his program were never fully actualized. It is interesting to note that Gardner's notions on the importance of crop diversification persist to this day. As recently as December of 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported on the benefits of diversification in modern farming practices. Despite the recent economic downturn, the USDA noted that, "the U.S. horticulture industry as a whole is showing resilience by increasing diversification of the products produced."⁶⁸ Like the results of its contemporary practice, crop diversification and Gardner's Live-At-Home program could have significantly alleviated cash crop overproduction in North Carolina in the late 1920s and early 1930's. At the end of his term, Gardner's efforts to cut overproduction and diversify North Carolina's agriculture were summarized in a statement written by John A. Park, president of *The Raleigh Times* and the North Carolina Press Association. Park wrote, "Max Gardner's policies....were....many months before the pall of

⁶⁷ Allen Jay Maxwell, xxvii.

⁶⁸ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). *USDA Reports Increased Diversification in Horticulture Operations*. Dec. 13, 2010. Washington, D.C.. http://www.nass.usda.gov/Newsroom/2010/12_13_2010.asp

depression gripped our land. But the governor already had seen that North Carolina, if it would be saved, must save itself.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ John Park. Four Years With Gardner, December 16, 1932. Statement. From *Gardner's Papers and Letters*, 699.

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