

25 MILLION
LESS HOGS
Means UNEMPLOYMENT

Iowa Once Won A War -- The 'Cow War'



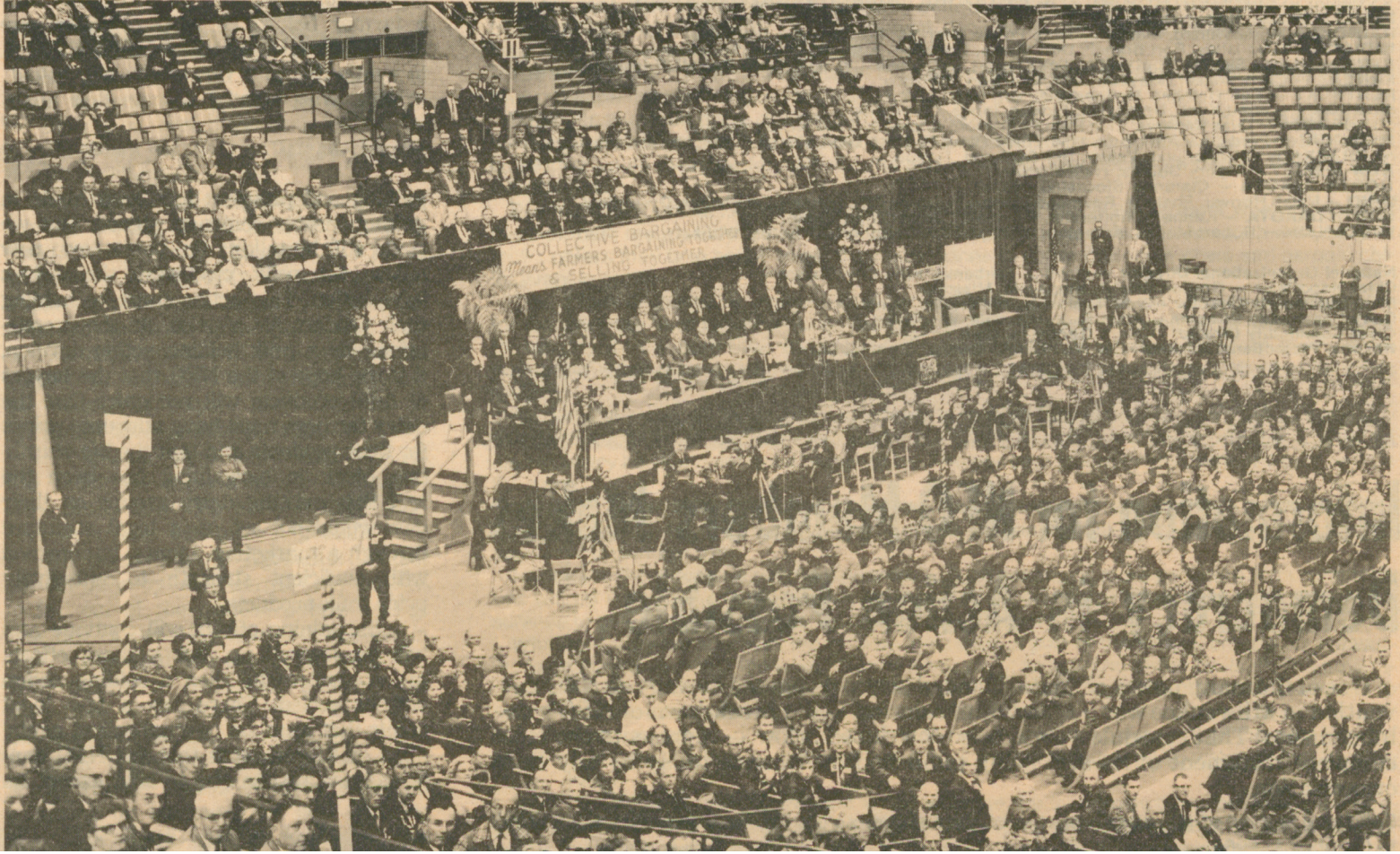
Activist Agriculture:

Farm protest in Iowa,
1929–1969

July 18, 2018–January 2019
403 Parks Library
Special Collections Reading Room

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Library

Delegates Vote Milk Holding Action



THROUGHOUT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, farmers in Iowa and the Midwest struggled to make a living off their land and hard work. Post-war price busts and the Great Depression only exacerbated the general erosion in farm parity as increasing costs of production were not matched by an increase in farm commodity prices. In response, farmers organized in an effort to move from being victims of the economic and social situation to self-determined shapers of action. In this exhibit, we take a closer look at mobilization of farmers to confront and obstruct tuberculosis testing of cattle during the Iowa Cow Wars of the early 1930s and the commodity holding actions of the National Farmers Organization (NFO) in the 1960s. The exhibit will cover the actions and methods used by the farmers as well as how they leveraged the media to affect change. Finally, we look at the parallel struggles of migrant farm workers to improve wages and working conditions, examining the efforts both to pass legislation in Iowa in support of migrant farm workers and to support the Delano Grape Strike in California and the related international boycott.

Exhibition Checklist

Reasons for farm protests

Map showing Cow War and National Farmers Organization events in Iowa, from 1931–1967, courtesy of Kimberly Anderson.

Charts showing rising farm costs and lowering farm prices. Facsimile. Graphs from *NFO Reporter*, July 1964. Call Number HD1751 N213.

Gertrude Cox. *Index number of Iowa Farm Products Prices*. Ames, Iowa: Agricultural Experiment Station, Iowa State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts, 1935. Call Number S542 I9b.

Law Relating to Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication, 1929. Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 2, folder 5.

Cow Infographic illustrating how farmers were compensated if a cow was condemned during the Cow War, courtesy of Olivia Garrison (*above right*).

Political flyer showing costs of farm machinery versus labor costs and, on verso, descriptions of farm and wage-earner relationships, 1946. Merle Hanson Papers, MS 595, box 4, folder 13.

The Cow War

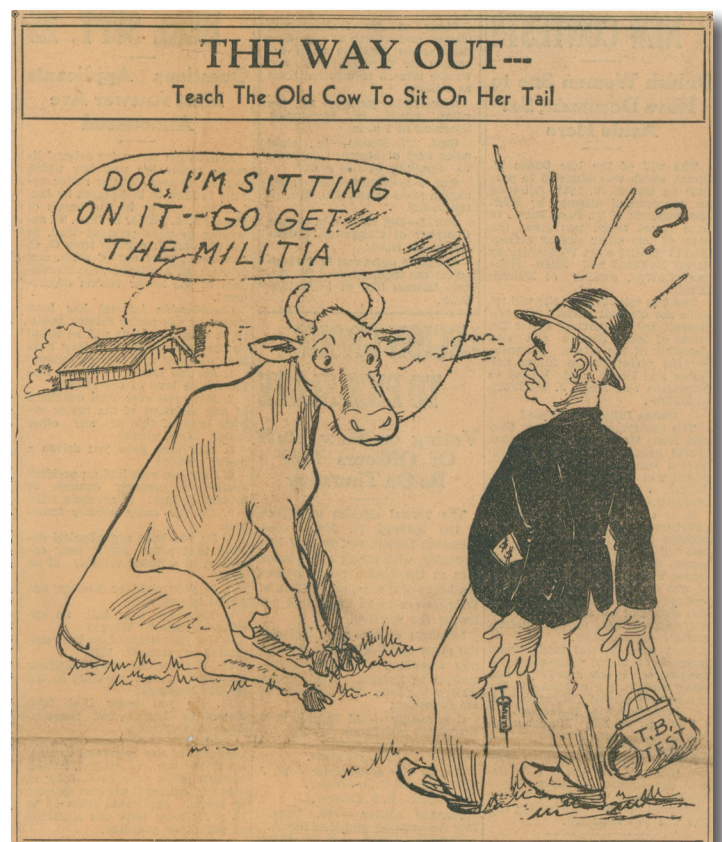
Proclamation of troops being sent to Cedar County, September 22, 1931. Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4.

Political cartoon, cow sitting on her tail so that she can't be tested for tuberculosis, September 24, 1931. Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4 (*right*).

Newspaper clipping, picture of troops in Cedar County, titled "The Cedar County Front—1931!" Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4.

Newspaper clipping, "Insurrection in Eastern Iowa!" No date. Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4.

Syringe and tuberculin. On loan from the R. Allen Packer Veterinary Heritage Room, Iowa State University Museum of Veterinary Medicine.





American Medical Liberty League. *Report of the Joint Committee on Tuberculin Test*, 1911, reprinted 1925. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 2, folder 5.

Division of Animal Industry Order of Quarantine. Notice to George Ormsby that his cows are all in quarantine until he tests them, May 1, 1931. Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4.

Correspondence to Ormsby, from the Iowa Department of Agriculture, in response to a letter he must have sent questioning the legality of the quarantine his cows were put under, May 7, 1931. Facsimile. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4.

Iowa Department of Agriculture. *Thirty Questions and Answers on Bovine Tuberculosis*, 1930. George J. Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 2, folder 5.

National Farmers Organization and holding actions

Photograph of 3 boys dumping milk cans onto a field, in Blue Earth, MN, 1967. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 6, folder 9 (*above*).

Headline “Delegates Vote Milk Holding Action,” *NFO Reporter*, December 1966. Facsimile. Call Number HD1751 N213 (*above introduction*).

Flyer stating “NFO Milk Holding Action Now in Effect” and advising members to hold for a 2-cent increase at farm level or a 1-dollar per hundredweight increase, March 1967. National Farmers Organization Records, MS 481, box 6, folder 21.

Photograph of NFO president Oren Lee Staley, who is answering questions from a reporter, after the first milk was poured in the streets of Corning, IA, 1967. National Farmers Organization Records, MS 588, box 6, folder 9.

Photograph of family walking through field with parked cars holding sign that reads, "We like farming but can't do it for fun alone. Support NFO," 1967. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 6, folder 9.

Photograph of women dumping cans of milk from a truck bed onto a snowy field in Herkimer County, NY, 1967. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 6, folder 9.

Photograph of men manning phones at NFO headquarters during milk holding action, 1967. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 11, folder 2 (*right*).

Panoramic photograph of many farm families dumping milk onto a field, 1967. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 6, folder 9.

Photograph of 3-year-old Peggy Kruse, daughter of NFO Publicity Chairman of Sauk County, WI, Harold Kruse. Peggy is churning butter, June 1967. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 7, folder 1 (*below right*).

Sidebar graphic regarding Anti-Trust Lawsuit, courtesy of Amy Bishop.

Headline images: "2 Trucks Hit by Bullets, *Detroit News*, ca. March 1967 and "Judge Orders NFO Not to Use Violence During Milk Holding," *Omaha World-Herald*, March 31, 1967, National Farmers Organizations Records, MS 481, box 3, folder 48. "Anti-Trust Suit Against NFO Dismissed," *NFO Reporter*, December 1967, Call Number HD1751 N213.

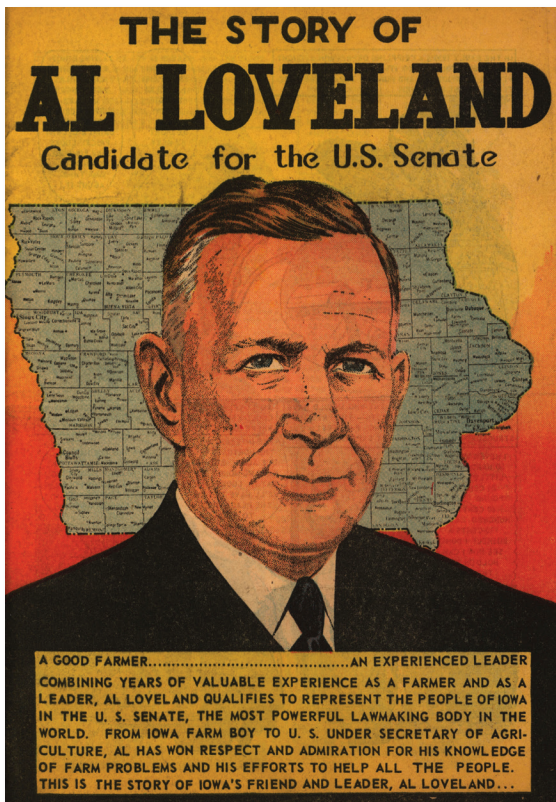
NFO chart showing changes in U.S. average milk prices received by farmers from 1965–1968, ca. 1968. National Farmers Organization Records, MS 481, box 3, folder 32.

News clipping "NFO improving milk prices" from *Ashland Times-Gazette*, Ashland, OH, describing improved prices due to NFO's 1967 holding action and new strategies in dairy marketing, December 7, 1971. National Farmers Organization Records, MS 481, box 3, folder 46.

Panoramic photograph of Annual Convention in Louisville, KY, 1969. National Farmers Organization Records, MS 481.

Milk pail. No date. Courtesy of Lonesome Pines Farms, John and Ramona Nitz, Larrabee, IA.





Farmers' protest methods

Political cartoon, "When 'Greek Meets Greek'," about the protests against bovine testing at the legislature, March 19, 1931. George Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4, folder E.

Poem in newspaper, "Knights of the Squirt Gun," about farmers' sentiment regarding cattle testing. No date. George Ormsby Papers, MS 109, box 4, folder E.

Iowa Farmers Union sandwich board, 1953. Artifact Collection, 2008-268.003.

Comic book, *The story of Al Loveland: Candidate for the U.S. Senate*, promoting Al Loveland's campaign for the U.S. Senate, 1950. Wayne Darrow Papers, MS 21, box 2, folder 9 (left).

NFO recruitment pamphlet "Will it be individual begging...or collective bargaining?" ca. 1960s. National Farmers Organization Records, MS 481, box 3, folder 32.

Manual for Organizers, guidebook on how to recruit members and organize new groups of the Iowa Farmers Union. No date. Merle Hansen Papers, MS 595, box 4, folder 33.

Photograph of farmer holding rifle to a pig in a pen full of dead animals, 1968. Charles Walters Papers, MS 588, box 11, folder 2 (below left).

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Photograph of Harold Hughes (center) with José and Irene Guzman (right) and others. Facsimile. Irene and Jose Guzman Papers, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA (opposite).

Photograph of Cesar Chavez and John Terronez with others. Facsimile. Mary Terronez Papers, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

"Don't Buy Heinz" flyer. Facsimile. LULAC Council 10 Records, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

"Do Not Shop at Eagle/No Compre en Eagle" flyer with two sides, one in English and one in Spanish. Facsimile. LULAC Council 10 Records, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

"Americans Reject Grapes of Wrath" flyer. Facsimile. LULAC Council 10 Records, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.





“Give this child a chance” flyer, in support of Grape Boycott. Facsimile. LULAC Council 10 Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

Newspaper clipping, “Stanley ‘Too Busy’ to Appear at Rally.” Facsimile. Mary Terronez Papers, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries. Iowa City, IA.

Newspaper clipping, “Grape Strike Spurs Quad City Protest,” *The Catholic Messenger*, Davenport, IA, May 15, 1969. Facsimile. Mary Terronez Papers, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

Page from *LULAC Glances*, Facsimile. LULAC Council 10 Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

Community Efforts Organization news release flyer, ca. 1969. Facsimile. LULAC Council 10 Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

All items come from collections located in Iowa State University Library Special Collections & University Archives, unless otherwise noted.

What conclusions can be drawn from the activism of farmers and farm workers in Iowa during this era? There are no neat conclusions. Each event highlighted in this exhibit is individual, but also operates in a larger context of societal forces. In the case of the Cow Wars, the farmers ultimately submitted to the will of the state government. In March 1967, the NFO milk holding action was brought to an early end by the federal government’s antitrust lawsuit, but they capitalized on the momentum of the holding action to launch an All-Commodities Holding Action the following year. However, after another decade, the Farm Crisis of the 1980s revealed that farmers were still subject to broader market forces. While the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) chapters in Iowa and affiliated groups made incremental gains in passing Iowa legislation to improve working and living conditions for migrant farm workers, the progress was extremely modest in the broader context of discrimination and exploitation.

Special Acknowledgments

Janet Weaver

Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries

Exhibition Curators

Amy Bishop

Olivia Garrison

Kimberly Anderson

Exhibition Coordinator

Rachel Seale

Exhibition Catalog

Harrison W. Inefuku

Digital Exhibit

Lori Bousson

<https://exhibits.lib.iastate.edu/activist-agriculture>

Iowa State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, ethnicity, religion, national origin, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a U.S. Veteran. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies may be directed to Office of Equal Opportunity, 3410 Beardshear Hall, 515 Morrill Road, Ames, Iowa 50011, Tel. 515 294-7612, Hotline 515-294-1222, email eooffice@iastate.edu.

**IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY**