

UNIT 11: THE GOLDEN AGE (1897-1918)

Topic: Agriculture

INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS

The period between 1897 and 1918 is often called Iowa's Golden Age of Agriculture. Agriculture moved from a primitive means of survival to a modern business venture.

As the American urban population expanded in the early years of the century, the need for basic farm products increased. With growing numbers of urban workers, money was available to purchase farm products which fed the ever growing families in urban areas.

During this period, farmers attained high levels of production and received good prices for their products. In 1910 the average increase in prices received for all kinds of farm produce was 87 percent higher than in 1900 while the cost of equipment and basic necessities had increased only 5 percent. In 1916, 53 percent of the livestock received at Chicago came from Iowa. Iowa also led the nation in corn and oat production. With money to spend, farm families purchased equipment for both the farm operation as well as the farm home. Farm families could afford to live with a certain degree of personal comfort.

Also during this period, agriculture became an important business enterprise and Iowa's major industry. To hold onto Iowa's share of the agricultural market, better products and higher production became a concern. The many farm journals and papers published at this time reflected this sentiment.

These journals brought information about new farm technology and agricultural science to the farm home. The Iowa State Agricultural College also supported the application of science and technology to agriculture. The transfer of new-found knowledge from the college to the farm was accomplished in two ways--through the agricultural trade journals and the development of the extension service.

Directed by Perry Greeley Holden, the extension service, included county farm demonstration work, regional short courses, and the "seed corn gospel trains." Information was even extended to rural school classrooms. Jessie Field Shambaugh, O.H. Benson, and Cap E. Miller pioneered educational programs that instructed boys and girls in seed corn testing and corn planting. These programs evolved into 4-H Clubs for farm children.

Another role of the extension service involved animal disease research which eventually provided a serum to prevent hog cholera. In 1914 this disease caused a direct loss of \$67,697,461 in Iowa. The extension service implemented the hog immunization program after which losses from that disease declined dramatically.

The agricultural college and journals also promoted the use of silos. Iowa's landscape changed as farmers constructed silos on their farms to provide a good year-round feed supply for animals. Silage made possible the maintenance of large herds year round, increasing farm income.

Iowa also became a beneficiary of the federal soil surveys. Begun in 1904, the surveys led to the draining of 4 million acres of Iowa land, mainly in the northwest part of the state.

The farm home also profited during this prosperous time. To name a few, conveniences for homemakers included running water in the farmhouse and concrete sidewalks to prevent mud from being tracked in on shoes. Because of a few labor saving devices, the family had more leisure time. With money available from the selling of farm products at good prices, a few items for enjoyment could be purchased.

The rural family became less isolated as transportation and communication improvements arrived. By 1901 rural free delivery provided daily mail service to farmsteads. Formerly, mail was picked up at the nearby town post office when someone from the farm traveled to town on other business. As soon as telephone lines were strung, Iowa farm families took advantage of the telephone. By 1920, 90 percent of Iowa's farmhomes had telephone service.

In 1914, the war in Europe began. This event created a world wide market for Iowa farm products. To cope with the wartime labor shortage after the United States entered the war, farmers purchased power driven machinery, especially tractors and harvesting equipment.

The *Iowa Farmstead* (1920) overviews the great advances made in Iowa agriculture during the Golden Age (1897-1918). Each of the developments identified above are addressed through primary source articles, photographs and advertisements selected for use in the *Iowa Farmstead*. The six lessons included in this guide are each designed to focus on one area of agriculture development during the Golden Age.

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