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## Review of *The American Farmer and the New Deal* By Theodore Saloutos

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*The American Farmer and the New Deal.* By Theodore Saloutos. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982. Photographs, illustrations, bibliography, index. xviii + 327 pp. \$22.50.

This posthumously published study by Theodore Saloutos is an important addition to the burgeoning number of works on New Deal farm programs. The subject is enormous. Saloutos focuses on the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's efforts to curtail production and to enact marketing agreements, the struggle to broaden farm relief to include both black and white farmers on the bottom half of the rural economic and social scale, the fight to bring electricity to rural America, Henry Wallace's quest to open up the clogged system of international trade, and the programs to rescue the farmers and ranchers of the Great Plains from

the ravages of the disastrous droughts of 1934 and 1936. Throughout the book he examines the complex nature of the farm crisis, the persistent conflicts among the New Dealers, and the often bitter opposition of Congress and the farm organizations to administration policies.

The success of the New Deal farm programs varied. Some, such as those seeking to expand foreign trade, were wholly futile; others, particularly the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Rural Electrification Administration, permanently improved living conditions for millions of Americans. The programs authorized by the first Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, and the second Agricultural Adjustment Act failed to restore farm income to the level of 1929 and did not resolve the problem of surplus production. Nevertheless, they did inject desperately needed cash payments into the pockets of struggling farmers and were a "healthy display of democracy in action" (p. 86). Saloutos is critical of USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) administrators for their slow response to rural poverty. Although he finds, as have a number of scholars, that the benefits of the New Deal farm programs were largely limited to commercial farmers, he contends that the fundamental problems facing the rural poor were not created by the depression or the AAA and could not be solved by administrative edict. In balance, he concludes that with "all its limitations and frustrations, the New Deal . . . constituted the greatest innovative epoch in the history of American agriculture" (p. 270).

Saloutos's book is based on impressive research in the voluminous records of government agencies, oral histories, printed government documents, and individual manuscript collections. Unfortunately, he does not deal with the Farm Credit Administration, one of the most important and successful of the New Deal agencies aiding farmers. His discussion of the second Agricultural Adjustment Act and its implementation might also have been expanded. At times, the reader may become lost in the morass of details concerning the evolution of policies and the administration of the various

programs; but in general *The American Farmer and the New Deal* is an able account of the New Deal's struggle to lift American agriculture out of the Great Depression.

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