

# Northwest History Consortium

## Farm Subsidies

**William Roath**  
**10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> Grades**

### National Standard

**Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945) / Standard 2**

**Standard 2:** *How political, religious, and social institutions emerged in the English colonies.*

### NOTE TO TEACHERS

This lesson is primarily designed for Era 8, the Great Depression and the New Deal. However, in order to complete the lesson fully, students will need to review some of the history of the World War II recovery, the Cold War, and the modern era.

The lesson will involve all five of the National History Standards in Historical Thinking: Chronological Thinking, Historical Comprehension, Historical Analysis and Interpretation, Historical Research Capabilities, and Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision Making.

### BACKGROUND

Following decades of growth and better than average growing seasons, and after a few years of the highest farm commodity prices in U.S. history and federal encouragement to expand production as much as possible, US agriculture as a whole sunk into economic depression in 1920. With a brief exception, conditions worsened throughout the decade, and this agricultural depression contributed significantly to the onset of the Great Depression. With that onset, what had been a crisis became total disaster. Farm commodity prices tumbled to unbearable and historic lows, land and produce became worthless, and many who made their living from the land were starving. Adding injury to injury, even the climate turned from bad to worse, resulting in the Dust Bowl.

The New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt faced three daunting challenges for American agriculture:

1. immediate relief to stop abject suffering;
2. raising commodity prices and keeping them up;
3. and correcting long-term sources of agricultural decline for the future.

Many programs were tried—some of which failed, some did what was needed, and several succeeded brilliantly.

To raise and sustain commodity prices, among other things, the Agricultural Adjustment Act paid farmers to take land out of production and provided subsidized loans to enable farmers to continue producing on the remainder. With many adjustments and name changes since, these are still essentially the farm subsidy programs in effect today. However, these programs have come under increasing attack domestically by fiscal conservatives and urban taxpayers, and internationally by US trade partners and developing nations that compete with US farmers.

# Northwest History Consortium

## Farm Subsidies

### PROBLEM (FOR TEACHER'S EYES ONLY)

Are agricultural subsidies worth the money? If so, how and why? If not, should they be scrapped or reformed? If scrapped, what are the probable results? If reformed, how so and for what goals?

### SCENARIO

You are staff for several farm-states' US senators. The next farm bill is due in 2012; and with the federal deficit at record levels, agricultural subsidies are in trouble, since a coalition of urban Democrats and suburban Republicans have stated their intent to severely cut, if not eliminate, all of them.

Your bosses want you to justify these subsidies and suggest possible reforms for improving their political acceptability. Specifically, they want you to review the history behind the subsidies—why and how they came to be and have evolved—and with that evidence project the consequences of their elimination and suggest possible improvements.

### TASKS

Each group will produce an illustrated, written report of professional quality (suitable for distribution to other senators, to lobbyists, and news media). The specific design and format is up to the students, but they must address the following questions specifically, providing multiple illustrations for each section:

- What was the origin of farm subsidies, and why and how were they implemented as they were? (This question concerns the Great Depression and New Deal.)
- How have the subsidies evolved and why? (Note that this question will involve students in post-WWII reconstruction, the Cold War, and relations with the Soviet Union, etc.)
- What are the arguments for and against farm subsidies in general and current programs in particular?
- Recommendations for the 2012 farm bill.

## Northwest History Consortium

### Farm Subsidies

#### RESOURCES

Students will be encouraged to find *reliable*, academic quality resources on their own in the library and on the Internet. Rules for the course, already known by students, prohibit use of Wikipedia, Ask.com, and similar sites. Interviews of actual, individual producers and consumers to illustrate key points and positions are also encouraged and will be rewarded in grading. Resources are suggested below as starting points.

#### Excerpted handouts provided from:

- Heilbroner, Robert L. The Economic Transformation of America. Boston, MA. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1977.
- Leuchtenburg, William E. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940. New York, NY. Harper Perennial, 1963.
- Murphy, Mary. Hope in Hard Times: New Deal Photographs of Montana, 1936-1942. Helena, Mt. Montana Historical Society Press, 2003.
- Phillips, Cabell. From the Crash to the Blitz: 1929-1939. Bronx, NY. Fordham University Press, 2000.
- Saloutos, Theodore. The American Farmer and the New Deal. Ames, IA. Iowa State Press, 1982.
- Shannon, David A. The Great Depression. New York, NY. Prentice Hall Trade, 1960.

#### Internet

Economic History Services (Santa Clara University). ©2010. Santa Clara, CA . 29 Dec. 2010 <<https://www.eh.net/>>.

"The Great Depression: Primary Sources Set." The Library of Congress. Washington, DC. 29 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/great-depression/set.html>>.

US Census Bureau. Washington, DC. 29 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.census.gov/>>.

US Department of Agriculture (Research Services). 22 Dec. 2010. Washington, DC. 29 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/>>.

# Northwest History Consortium

## Farm Subsidies

### ASSESSMENT

### Written Report Rubric

	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing</b>	Grammar and spelling are correct or nearly so, and writing flows and engages.	Grammar and spelling are mostly correct; writing is mostly smooth and interesting.	Grammar and spelling are usually correct; writing is understandable.	Report is readable, though with some difficulty.	Little care seems to have been taken with grammar, spelling, or writing.
<b>Illustrations</b>	Each component of the report includes multiple relevant illustrations.	Each component includes at least one relevant illustration.	Most components include at least one relevant illustration.	Report contains a couple of relevant illustrations.	No illustrations.
<b>Sources</b>	Most sources are primary, including personal interviews; all are academically sound, and all are properly cited.	About half of sources are primary, and most are sound and properly cited.	One source is primary, some are sound, and/or all are cited, but some citations are incomplete.	One or more sources are cited.	No sources cited.
<b>Origins</b>	A thorough but concise summary of the origins of subsidies is provided.	A complete account of origins is provided.	An understandable, if incomplete, account of origins is provided.	A partial account of origins is provided.	Origins not included.
<b>Evolution</b>	A thorough but concise summary of the evolution of subsidies is provided.	A complete account of evolution is provided.	An understandable if incomplete account of evolution is provided.	A partial account of evolution is provided.	Evolution not included
<b>Arguments</b>	An objective summary of multiple arguments is provided for both sides, addressing both general and specific programs.	An objective summary of at least one substantive argument is provided for both sides and for both general and specific programs.	Arguments are provided for one or another side or for general or specific programs.	An argument is provided.	No arguments provided.
<b>Recommendations</b>	Practical and logical recommendations are provided.	Reasonable recommendations are provided.	Serious recommendations are provided.	At least one recommendation is provided.	No recommendations provided.

## Northwest History Consortium

### Farm Subsidies

#### REFERENCES/CITATIONS

“History Standards for Grades 5-12 United States.” UCLA National Center for History in the Schools. 2005. Los Angeles, CA. 22 December 2010 <<http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/us-standards5-12.html>>.

Roath, William. “Farm Subsidies.” NWESD Organization. 2008. Anacortes, WA. 29 December 2010 <[http://www.nwesd.org/1510101216191755740/lib/1510101216191755740/8.2\\_Farm.Subsidies.Roath.10-12](http://www.nwesd.org/1510101216191755740/lib/1510101216191755740/8.2_Farm.Subsidies.Roath.10-12)>.